

Response to Tower Players / Cannock Chase Arts Council, affiliated members and other interested and affected parties.

General Questions relating to the proposed closure of both the Museum and the Prince of Wales Theatre:

1. It is felt that the council has conspired to release this consultation with as little room for manoeuvre as possible especially as it spans the Christmas holiday. In the spirit of collaborative working, we request an extension to the consultation period, by a minimum of two weeks.

The timeline for the consultation process has been determined by the timeline for setting the Council's budget. The Council legally has to set a balanced budget by the beginning of March.

The Cabinet is meeting on 30 January to recommend the budget to Council (meeting 12 February). This means that we need to close the consultation on 2nd January in order to allow time for the results to be analysed and a report prepared for Cabinet on the outcome of the consultation. The papers for the Cabinet have to be published 5 days in advance of the meeting.

The consultation process is running for just over a month and meets the 30 day requirement. Regrettably, we are unable to extend the consultation period itself. However, we will continue to work with groups and organisations beyond this period to explore options and suggestions put forward.

2. Where are the stock condition surveys for the theatre and the museum? We understand that the leisure centres have seen theirs, but the theatre and museum haven't - why?

- a. Can the council release the full stock condition survey reports for the Museum and Theatre including all related financial numbers, as soon as possible to be allow groups to begin formulating proposals with this most vital piece of information? Is it possible to release draft numbers under a non-disclosure agreement to limited parties?

We have now published on our website a summary of the stock condition reports for both the Prince of Wales Theatre and the Museum of Cannock Chase. <https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/council/your-community/culture-and-heritage-information>

- b. Can the council release the full stock condition survey reports for the Rugeley and Cannock Leisure Centres and Fives Pavilion including all related financial numbers, as soon as possible to be allow full and fair comparison and contextualisation? Is it possible to release draft numbers under a non-disclosure agreement to limited parties?

We are not releasing this information at this time as it is not directly relevant to the proposals to close the Prince of Wales Theatre and the Museum of Cannock Chase.

- c. By what date is CBRE, the company that undertook the stock condition survey, contractually obligated to provide a ratified report?

Data now published

- d. What are the consultancy costs to CBRE for carrying out the reviews and producing the reports, and has this come out of the LUF?

The cost of the CBRE surveys for all of the sites is approximately £24,000. The cost has been met by the Council as part of the review of the Leisure, Culture & Heritage Services and has not been funded from the LUF monies.

3. There is a concern that the form of questions in the online consultation form could lead to a skewed answer where results are put through analysis software. By example, question 20 has no option to select either the museum or theatre. Can the council indicate how the data from these questions will be analysed and assessed, and provide assurances that this will not lead to skewing of results?

- a. Can the raw number results of the survey be made public (anonymised) once closed so that we can see how many responses have been received and what those responses have been for each question? As the form is online and many of the questions are tick box answers, this information should be easily collatable within 24 hours of the consultation closing.

We do not consider that the consultation questions are skewed. We have endeavoured to structure them to cover as broad a range of issues as possible and there is an open text question at the end to allow the consultee to offer any views they wish.

With specific regard to question 20, the options provided are designed to seek views on alternative service provision options so the current venues are not included. However, there is an "other" option which could be used to answer Museum, Theatre or both.

Our survey software will provide a report summarising all of the quantitative data and details of this will be included in the report to Cabinet. With regard to the qualitative question, it is our intention to theme the responses from this so far as is reasonably practicable. Those responses received outside of the consultation survey will also be analysed and acknowledged in the report to Cabinet. It is the qualitative data that is going to take us longer to analyse.

4. What is the council's assessment on the social impact on community cohesion if the plan to close both sites goes ahead?

We are gathering data as part of the consultation process and will include this in the Cabinet report.

- a. what is the wider economic impact to businesses who hire to groups working towards hiring the Prince of Wales.

We have not undertaken an assessment to understand the impact on businesses in Cannock Town Centre who may be affected by the proposed closure of the Theatre (eg bars, restaurants), as this would be very difficult to quantify to a reasonable level of accuracy and meaningfulness.

5. If the council did sell the land, the money, capital receipt, cannot be used to plug a council revenue gap

- a. What would happen to the money?
- b. Could it be used to build a new venue(s)?

The Council has not considered any specific plans for either of the sites affected by the proposals. If either or both sites were to be sold, the money would be a capital receipt to the Council.

6. Can the council commit to providing us full accounts for both the theatre and the museum over the last 4 years (post COVID) so we are able to assess running costs and where both venues are losing money?

- a. To include (but not limited to):
 - i. Footfall
 - ii. Utilisation
 - iii. Subsidies / Funding received
 - iv. Professional Hire / Other hire breakdown
 - v. Ticket sales
 - vi. Staffing costs
 - vii. Maintenance costs

We are unable to provide the last 4 years accounts but IHL have provided details of the running costs for both the Theatre and the Museum for one year and these are available on our website: <https://www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/council/your-community/culture-and-heritage-information>

Please note that the figures relate only to the running costs for each of the sites and do not include IHL's central overheads for the provision of "back office" / support services.

7. What is the formal process for proposals to be submitted for keeping either / both sites open. On the assumption that all relevant information is made available by the council to construct the relevant proposal, and what are the timescales for those proposals being assessed?

Proposals for keeping either/both sites open should be submitted to **Anna Nevin, Head of Wellbeing**. An outline of your proposal should be submitted by **9th January 2025**. The Council will continue to maintain a dialogue with interested parties up to the Council decision on 12 February and potentially beyond this date depending on the decision taken by the Council.

8. What will be the plan for the council offloading the property in the event of a charitable trust taking over - will this be offered to a trust on a rental basis, sold to the trust, or to a third party that rents to the trust?

This would be a matter for discussion with relevant parties coming forward with proposals.

9. Is the council prepared to enter into a 'lock out agreement' and / or an exclusivity agreement post April to ensure both buildings (theatre and museum) cannot be subject to change of use or sale for a minimum period of 6-12 months to give adequate time for alternative proposals to be prepared and submitted once full financial details have been provide as requested in previous questions? Can you confirm the mechanism for putting such an agreement in place? This is particularly critical for the Museum site.

This is an option that the Council would consider given that both sites will require time to decommission services etc and plan for future service provision. This will depend on the options submitted to the Council and further discussions with interested parties.

10. Will the council agree to convene a meeting at the earliest opportunity of all those who have indicated to the council they may be interested in taking on either the theatre or the museum?

The Council would be willing to meet with interested parties on receipt and consideration of their proposals.

11. In the meeting Dec 11th, council officers informed the group that 15% of council budget is spent on leisure and culture, and that this is all paid to IHL. Can you please provide a breakdown as to which portion of this % is allocated to each venue under IHL management, preferably covering the last 4 years? Can you also confirm these funds were ring fenced for Cannock only and could not have been used to subsidise other contracts IHL were maintaining in other districts?

The funds paid to IHL are exclusively for the provision of services in Cannock Chase District.

We have provided the IHL budget information for the two venues in question as part of the consultation and so it is not relevant to provide the budgets for those areas not being consulted on.

Questions specifically relating to proposed closure of The Prince of Wales Theatre:

12. Phase 1 of LUF, approx. £9M, is earmarked for the demolition of the car park and the creation of the Northern Gateway, with c£2M of that already allocated to cover the design element of the work. We now understand Phase 2 to be the acquisition and demolition of the Forum building and the buildings down to the old Boots store round to Barclays.

- a. When was the project variation request submitted to Central Government (MP had indicated this was April/May 2024)?

The original Project Adjustment Request seeking an extension of time to spend the LUF grant was submitted in November 2023, but no decision was received on this. Following the review of the RIBA 3 detailed design and costs report and discussions with the DLUHC Discovery Team a further Project Adjustment Request was submitted on 19 July 2024 following Cabinet resolution on 12 June 2024.

- b. When is a response from central government expected?

Project adjustment requests are not currently being considered. The Council has instead received a ministerial letter on 13 December 2024 confirming that the LUF programme will be extended into 2025/26 and that the LUF funding award is secure. We are still awaiting formal confirmation of this and it is expected in January.

- c. Why have Phase 2 changes not been communicated to the public?

The Phase 2 changes were approved by Cabinet on 12 June 2024 and the Council issued a press release on 14 June 2024 and details of these are available on the Council's website.

- d. The original LUF bid was to improve the cultural provision for Cannock, how is this work cultural or in support of heritage if it involves closing and demolishing the theatre?

The first round of the Levelling Up Funding focusses on three themes: smaller transport projects that make a genuine difference to local areas; town centre and high street regeneration; and support for maintaining and expanding the UK's world-leading portfolio of cultural and heritage assets". As such bidding authorities were required to specify the proportion of requested funding that applied to each element.

The proportions for Cannock Chase's bid were as follows: Regeneration and town centres 46.1 % and Cultural 53.9%.

The uncommitted LUF funds remain available for a potential phase 3. This could include capital enhancement works to the theatre subject to an extension of time for the LUF grant and the works being viable and value for money.

- e. If this is agreed by central government, it would leave the PoW as an isolated building in disrepair, this would lead one to believe that the council's intention is to close and demolish to make way for whatever development is in the offing as part of Phase 2. Can the council give assurances that time would be allowed to pull together a community bid to save the theatre?

The Council hasn't yet considered any options for the future of the site. Depending on the proposals put forward, the Council may be willing to consider allowing a period of time to put together a community bid.

- f. Can you respond to rumours that new council offices are being planned in the space created in Phase 2 (if approved)

The scope of Phase 2 work remains as set out in the Cabinet report of 12 June 2024 and these do not include plans to build new council offices.

- g. If the theatre building is to be left standing post Phases 1 and 2 demolition works, can the council confirm that the existing ramp and loading deck access and fire escape facilities on the car park side of the building will be retained also as formal theatre access and egress routes?

The full details of the approved demolition methodology for Phase 1 are available to view as part of the associated planning application, reference CH/18/247 which can be accessed here: [Citizen Portal Planning](#). It is currently anticipated that the access and fire escape facilities will need to be removed as part of the demolition works.

- h. Are the existing ramp, loading deck, fire escapes etc considered part of the theatre building footprint, or will anyone taking on the theatre need to negotiate retention of the use / ownership of these areas with another party (within or without the council)?

The council will discuss this with parties that are interested in taking on the theatre.

- i. Will phase 2 demolition works impact on potential operation of the theatre should it be in a position to operate at the end of phase 1?

The council are unsure of the potential impact at present as the detail of phase 2 is currently being developed. Any demolition works will be subject to planning approval.

13. Has an impact assessment been undertaken on behalf of the nighttime economy?

- a. Were local businesses consulted before the plans were made?

We have not undertaken a separate consultation with businesses but they can contribute to the wider consultation process which closes on 2nd January 2025.

14. Have you engaged with professional hirers/contractors/service providers of the theatre and museum regarding these proposals?

- a. If so, what was their response?
- b. if not, are you planning to?

We are intending to work with local groups who use the theatre and museum to support them in finding suitable alternative accommodation in the event that one of both of the facilities close.

15. To what extent are the council open to a charitable trust taking over the theatre?

- a. To make the theatre viable for a charity / community group to take over the running, significant up to now neglected maintenance is required on the building, primarily a significant repair to or full replacement of the roof
- b. Can the council commit to making good these repairs?

Any business plans submitted by interested parties would need to be robust and demonstrate an ability to operate without council subsidy. Should this be the case, the council will be open to discussions around these repairs.

- c. What has been done proactively to make the theatre and museum a going concern? E.g. roof, considering fire escapes, general access if the service road is removed etc.

IHL manage the theatre on behalf of the council and use their knowledge and expertise to maintain the theatre as a going concern.

16. When the theatre closes as planned as part of Phase 1 in April 2025, there will be costs attached to maintaining the building whilst closed.

a. What are the mothball costs projected to be?

These costs are currently being quantified in detail.

b. What provision has been made should phase 1 take longer than the anticipated 12 months to complete?

It is not anticipated that phase one will take longer than 12 months. Sufficient contingency has been built into the programme to ensure this.

c. What provision has been made should the theatre require to remain mothballed due to planned demolition work in phase 2?

N/A

d. What will be the impact on the taxpayer?

Any revenue costs incurred will have to be borne by the council's general fund.

17. Where in the district will the many professional and amateur performers be expected to carry on their work if the theatre closes?

As per our response to q14, we are intending to work with local groups who use the theatre and museum to support them in finding suitable alternative accommodation in the event that one of both of the facilities close.

18. Even after the two revised 'phases' of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) and the money which had already been spent on consultants, studies etc. our understanding on the limited information available is that there remains a sum of £2M left in the LUF. Is this correct?

a. What is happening with that money given the proposed closure?

b. Does that not show that the council could use the LUF money to invest in the long term future of the theatre, even if transitions to become a charitable trust?

Any monies remaining in the LUF programme will be invested in the area in line with agreements with central government.

c. During our meeting on 11th December, Tony Johnson and Anna Nevin repeatedly referred to the fact The Prince of Wales Theatre was still part of the LUF programme.

Given £2m has been spent on design, £9m on Phase 1, and phase 2 is purely to be demolition work, can the council provide details on exactly how the LUF still relates to The Prince of Wales, outside of the fact the building will not form part of the planned demolition work?

No formal decision has been taken to remove the Prince of Wales theatre from the LUF programme.

- d. If there is no £2M remaining in the LUF, how is the theatre still part of the programme?

No formal decision has been taken to remove the Prince of Wales theatre from the LUF programme

Questions specifically relating to proposed closure of The Museum of Cannock Chase:

19. Where will the 30,000 objects held in the museum collection go and who will maintain them?
- a. Will they be mothballed or transferred to other museums out of the district such as the Staffordshire History Centre or the National Coal Mining Museum in Yorkshire and at what cost?
 - b. How long will all this take?
 - c. Will there then be public access?
 - d. Who will do the work?
 - e. What are the anticipated costs related to this activity?

We recognise that if the decision is taken to close the Museum, we will need to make arrangements for the decommissioning of the site and planning for the future of the artefacts. No decisions have been taken as to what will happen to them; this would be considered as part of the decommissioning plans.

20. Who will contact the thousands of donors who have given objects and artefacts in good faith for the public benefit?
- a. Who will advise them of the fate of these items and how their gifts will be respected?
 - b. Who will deal with donors who wish to have their items returned to them rather than have them sent out of the area?

c. Again, what costs have been set aside to cover such an activity?

As per our response to Q19, arrangements to do all of this would be considered as part of the planning for decommissioning the Museum.

21. What provision will the council make for exhibitions by local artists and photographers in proper exhibition spaces?

As per our response to Q19, arrangements to do all of this would be considered as part of the planning for decommissioning the Museum.

22. What will happen to the unique local mining gallery and other local displays?

As per our response to Q19, arrangements to do all of this would be considered as part of the planning for decommissioning the Museum.

23. The council claims that it wants to maintain a heritage offer. How will it do this with no expert staff and no investment?

This will depend on the outcome of the consultation process but in the event of a decision to close the museum, appropriate provision would be made for the decommissioning of it.

24. Outreach heritage services are very competitive. In the absence of a venue, groups need to invest in a massive amount of equipment and somewhere to store it. For example, to set up a pre-historic camp in a school hall and provide 30 children with Roman shields. How will the council do this without investment?

a. *N.B. Outreach does not mean just to turn up at a school with one box of objects!*

This will also depend on the outcome of the consultation process, as to what people value about maintaining the area's heritage, and the Council can then plan accordingly. Budget will of course still be an issue but opportunities for grant funding would be explored as appropriate.

25. What will happen to the museum site, especially the Littleton Colliery Wheel, the old coal truck and the weighbridge as these also form part of the collection?

- a. Is the building to be mothballed or demolished and at what cost?
- b. What is the future of the entire site and the surrounding land?
- c. What are the implications of the site being an SSSI on any plans for it?

The Council has not yet considered any options for the future of the museum site; these will only be done if the decision is taken to proceed with the closure of the Museum. We are aware of the restrictions on the site and these would need to be considered as part of any future planning.

26. How does the council expect to complete the digitisation of the collection when the collections team have left or been made redundant?

- a. The council will also have to pay back the grant that has funded this project if it is not completed. If there is to be a digitised museum:
 - i. Who will do it?
 - ii. At what cost?
 - iii. How long will this take?

As per our response to Q23, this will depend on the outcome of the consultation process but in the event of a decision to close the museum, appropriate provision would be made for the decommissioning of it and this will include funds for staff and other associated costs to carry out this work. Completing the digitisation of the collection would be considered as part of these plans and existing staff retained as appropriate.

27. Are councillors aware that the museum has received over £450,000 in grants over the past five years?

- a. Most of this will have to be paid back if the museum closes. How much will this cost in terms of amounts to be returned, making good on any works begun and administration of the process?

We are collating this information as part of the consultation process and this will be fed into the Cabinet decision.

28. Where in the district will the many professional and amateur exhibitors be expected to carry on their work if the museum closes?

As per our response to q14, we are intending to work with local groups who use the theatre and museum to support them in finding suitable alternative accommodation in the event that one of both of the facilities close.