How investment in Hall for Cornwall created a space where creativity and community thrive

***Facts and figures***

* More than **£26m** was spent to renew and regenerate their auditorium
* This was supported by **9** major funders
* On track to hit **300,000** visits a year, a **54%** increase in audience numbers
* Created **29%** more jobs for the local community
* **Doubled** the size of their youth theatre and dance companies
* Delivered BREEAM rating **‘Very Good’** for environmental performance to a Grade II\* building

***A brief history of the space***

Hall for Cornwall is a Grade II\* listed building, originally built in 1847 as a municipal building holding council offices, fire and police stations and a large market hall. The first stage was added to the building in 1924. After significant deterioration, community campaigning achieved funding to rebuild the central space into a theatre in the early 90s. Hall for Cornwall opened as Cornwall’s largest theatre in 1997.

In 2018, Hall for Cornwall underwent a significant regeneration project which has added almost 400 more seats to their main auditorium, provided 29% more jobs for the local workforce, doubled size of youth theatre and dance companies, and created flexible workspace to support businesses and individuals in the creative industries. Hall for Cornwall reopened in 2021 and has consistently exceeded the KPIs projected as part of the renovation plans.

***How they achieved the works***

The project demonstrated what can be achieved by partnership working. By working with 9 major funders, the team at Hall for Cornwall were able to secure more than £26m for the works against an independently predicted economic impact of £54m. Each funder was interested in a different aspect of the project and bids were to funds with many different purposes, for example:

* Arts Council England supplied funding for a new auditorium, upgrading their systems and improving their carbon footprint
* A National Lottery Heritage Fund grant was to restore their heritage buildings and digitally archive the building’s history
* EU and UK Growth Fund investment provided support on the economic aspects of the project – on the basis that the project would create creative industries workspaces, which alone would add £5m Gross Value Added (GVA) to the local community and create over 100 new jobs for the area.
* Grant funding directly from the treasury to support Levelling Up and regeneration of Truro high street
* Cornwall Council providing critical match funding for all of the main grant awards

***What they have achieved***

Hall for Cornwall is now a flexible space for everyone. The playhouse auditorium is more accessible (700 seats with step-free access) seats more people and has improved sight lines, acoustics, and comfort. Backstage, the lighting and sound systems have been improved, increasing the flexibility of the stage for different purposes. The main entrance includes a space for pop-up performances and exhibitions. There is a pioneering pedestrian link throughout the building which not only allows behind-the-scenes glimpses of the daytime workings of the theatre but also connects the space to the main shopping streets to increase footfall and regenerate the high street. Everywhere, from the main entrance to the auditorium to the dressing-rooms, is fully accessible and includes Truro’s only Space to Change facility.

***Future proofed for greater resilience***

They present a mix of commercial and subsidised work as part of the stage programme. While they are a charity and social enterprise and provide excellent services to the community, the build has increased their profitability. Audiences have responded favourably to the new experience – occupancy pre-closure averaged 194,000 annually, while 24/25 will deliver just short of 300,000 audiences through the doors. A bigger, more accessible house with a more diverse programme has assisted with this growth, as has strong customer loyalty, with a 6% uplift in retention rates and a far-larger member base of nearly 5,000 ensuring an increasingly resilient model. They continue to focus on building credibility and minimising audience attrition rates.

***Cornwall’s National Theatre***

The regeneration project has centred Hall for Cornwall as the creative hub of the region, becoming not only Cornwall’s only largescale indoor theatre but also “Cornwall’s National Theatre”, providing a sense of place and community to local people. They are proud to represent their local area and maintain a community programme which showcases local performers along with a production company, Cornwall Playhouse Productions, that commissions and produces new largescale work every year. They are also now able to improve and expand the outreach programs offered including:

* Reaching more than 11,000 young people (from a total Cornwall population of only 500,000) directly through outreach work
* Schools’ programs in local primary and secondary schools across Cornwall
* Doubling the size of their youth theatre and dance companies
* Providing coworking spaces for local creatives
* An artist development program to support more than 400 local performing artists

***Preserving their story***

The building has been a local landmark in Truro since 1847. As a Grade II\* listed building, maintenance was an increasing budgetary concern. These works have enabled the preservation of the building whilst also making environmental and technical upgrades, removing some of the maintenance backlog that they were experiencing previously. The building’s history has been carefully archived and there is now an online [microsite](https://www.hallforcornwall.co.uk/heritage/about/) which contains an accessible archive of digital stories, photographs, and memorabilia.

***The Hurdles***

Securing and managing the level of funding needed was the biggest challenge. Initially an external consultant was hired and then a team built with bid writing and compliance skills, but this is not possible for all theatres. Additionally, working with so many individual funders meant that the reporting requirements were all different – increasing the administrative workload while having to write long business plans with different foci for each.

Hall for Cornwall is a success story, it shows the importance of investing in theatre buildings to allow theatres to thrive. Without the project, the theatre would have had to make their final curtain call as the upkeep was becoming unmanageable. Now it is a bustling hub for the creative industries in Cornwall, supporting the next generation of theatre makers and allowing the audiences of Cornwall to enjoy innovative and exciting productions.

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