

HALSTEAD COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE

Grant-focused business case, arts/community impact case and 5-year sustainability plan

From a cherished 1915 theatre (known as The Empire) to a welcoming community arts centre for Halstead and its surrounding villages



VIEW FROM BUTLER ROAD

Halstead community arts centre

Sheet 10

Architectural view from Butler Road. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, Empire Community Arts Theatre Design Studies, 15 April 2026.

Funding purpose

This business case presents the Community Arts Centre as a public-benefit investment: a project that protects a local cultural landmark, opens it up to more people, creates flexible space for arts and community life, and gives funders confidence that the completed building can be sustained responsibly moving forward.

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1. Executive summary for grant funders

Halstead Community Arts Centre will be a warm, accessible, environmentally responsible and flexible community arts hub created alongside the existing Empire Theatre on Butler Road. The project is not about replacing the Empire building. It is about giving a much-loved local theatre additional space, increased access, improved facilities, meaningful local partnerships and long-term resilience it needs to serve Halstead and its surrounding villages for the next generation.

The centre will convert underused land beside and behind the existing theatre into a place where people can meet, learn, rehearse, exhibit, perform, volunteer, socialise and take part in cultural activities close to home. It will provide modern community facilities while keeping the character of the Empire at the heart of the scheme.

The project answers a clear local need. Halstead is a historic North Essex market town serving surrounding rural communities, but local access to modern arts, cultural and community spaces is limited. Travel to larger cultural centres is difficult for many residents, especially in the evening and for people without private transport. The February 2026 business case also records expected local population growth, increasing demand for safe, inclusive and accessible spaces.

At a glance	Grant-funder summary
Project purpose	Create an inclusive community arts centre linked to the Empire Theatre, with flexible arts, learning, meeting, performance, exhibition, cafe/bar and support spaces. Assumptions have been made about the increase in participants based on a figure of 75% given the overall planned increase in size of the facilities and the versatility of the spaces that will be created. This will also be influenced by plans to open the new facilities for additional hours for community use.
Why grant funding is needed	The public benefit is broader than the commercial income the centre can generate initially. Grant investment is needed to create an accessible, sustainable community asset that can then trade responsibly and reinvest in community use.
Who will benefit	As above, participant numbers are projected on a 75% increase in participants. Children and young people, older residents, disabled people, dementia-friendly groups, local artists and performers, schools, voluntary groups, rural communities, families, audiences, volunteers and local businesses.
What will change	A constrained theatre and underused surrounding site will become a visible, welcoming cultural and community destination, improving access, participation, pride and footfall at the western end of Halstead.
Financial approach	The 5-year operating forecast is deliberately realistic. Year 1 shows a modest deficit as use builds; break-even is reached in Year 2; and Year 5 produces a sustainable operating surplus before depreciation and major capital renewal.
Sustainability commitment	Sustainability is now stated as a core objective, not an add-on: lower-energy design, renewable energy feasibility, efficient operation, active/rural transport planning, lifecycle maintenance and transparent reporting to funders.
Arts Council England fit	The project is mapped to Let's Create 2020-2030 and to the Arts Council's current Strategic Framework themes: supporting excellence, delivering for everybody and reaching everywhere.
Youth media and neurodiversity	Input from The Underdog Crew CIC will give neurodiverse young people a creative role in documenting the project through film, photography, interviews and social media, creating a lasting record and widening reach.
Patron support	Prominent figures in arts and entertainment have promised support as Patrons and will be announced soon. Currently we have Sam Swainsbury (Actor) and Malcolm Root (Local artist) George Courtauld The business case treats this as advocacy and profile-building support, not guaranteed income.

The funding proposition

Grant funders are invited to view this as a capital investment in community infrastructure, broader cultural opportunity and sustainable local place-making, not as a request to subsidise routine trading. The cafe/bar, room hire and programme income are important because they help keep the building open, staff the welcome, maintain reserves, protect affordability and plan for maintenance. They are not the reason the project exists. The reason is

public benefit: participation, inclusion, creativity, wellbeing, heritage, regeneration, environmental responsibility and community confidence.

The indicative construction budget supplied within the project material gives an overall suggested budget allowance of £1.689m including VAT for the Design 2 construction estimate. The wider funding package must also allow for fit-out, equipment, mobilisation, surveys, professional costs, sustainability measures and access improvements. The current working range for a full capital and launch package is therefore approximately £1.99m for the core scheme, rising to approximately £2.29m-£2.79m where the wider sustainability and access enhancement allowance is included. These figures will be updated by a Quantity Surveyor before final grant submission.

Local commitment is already visible. The source business case identifies an s106 allocation/application of £475,000 for a community building in Butler Road and Halstead Town Council seed funding of £68,000 for surveys and architect work. These commitments provide a strong base for match-funding, subject to formal release and confirmation.

Project objectives

The objectives below are intended to make the public-benefit case clearer for grant funders. Sustainability is woven through the objectives because a building that is not environmentally, financially and socially sustainable will not deliver long-term cultural benefit.

Objective	What this means in practice	Sustainability built in
Cultural access close to home	A local place to watch, make, rehearse, exhibit and learn without needing to travel to larger towns or cities.	Reduces access inequality for rural residents and supports a year-round programme with local roots.
Community connection and wellbeing	A welcoming hub for informal meeting, dementia-friendly activity, warm/community hub provision, volunteering and social prescribing links. All this while retaining a focus on the arts.	Builds social sustainability by reducing isolation and creating repeat, everyday use.
Young people, neurodiversity and creative skills	Safe, positive sessions for young people, including creative media, gaming-related creativity, technical theatre, film, photography and social media skills.	Creates a skills pathway and youth voice, including input from The Underdog Crew CIC.
Accessibility and dignity	Improved entrances, toilets, routes, backstage support, changing and performance access so more people can participate with dignity.	Keeps the Empire usable for future generations and makes inclusion a practical design requirement.
Environmental responsibility	Energy efficiency, renewable energy feasibility, careful materials, water-saving fittings, waste reduction and monitoring.	Supports lower running costs and demonstrates response to the climate emergency.
Financial and operational resilience	A realistic 5-year forecast, opening reserves, diversified income, controlled trading risk and planned maintenance.	Protects the grant investment after the capital project is complete.
Regeneration and pride in place	A visible cultural anchor for the western end of Halstead, bringing footfall, confidence and a renewed relationship with the Empire.	Creates a long-term community asset rather than a short-term project.

What success will feel like

A child sees their artwork on display in their town. A dementia choir member reaches the stage safely. A young person has somewhere safe to meet in the evening. A local artist runs a workshop close to home. A volunteer learns technical skills. A family comes for a film, a performance or a coffee and finds the doors open, the welcome warm and the building accessible. In real terms we see an increase in audience and public engagement rising from just under 59% to 75% initially. We base this view on the lack of similar provision within the immediate area along with the increasing population of the town and surrounding villages.

2. The story of the Empire and the opportunity now

The Empire is one of Halstead's cultural landmarks. It has adapted many times in its life, reflecting the changing habits of audiences and the determination of local people to keep it alive. The proposed Community Arts Centre is the next chapter in that story: not a departure from the Empire, but a way of ensuring that the Empire can continue to belong to the whole town. The town boasts strong community connections with a whole range of community focused activities, exemplified by the Community Connections group comprised of a whole range of groups that work with and in the community. ([Halstead Community Connections | Facebook](#))



The Empire



The existing Empire frontage and Butler Road February 2026. The new scheme is intended to enhance, not erase, this local landmark.

A brief history of the Empire

The Empire opened in 1915 as a purpose-built cinema with around 450 seats. Live entertainment soon became part of the offer, placing the building in a tradition of local entertainment and shared experience that has lasted for more than a century.

In the 1930s, the arrival of talking pictures changed the building again, with the focus moving more strongly to cinema. In 1951 the venue was refurbished with the frontage that remains an important part of its identity. The growth of television ownership reduced cinema admissions and the Empire closed in 1971.

The story did not end there. The building was mothballed rather than lost, and in 1978, following the formation of the Halstead Empire Theatre Trust, it reopened as a cinema and theatre. Later changes in cinemagoing, including the growth of multiplex provision, meant that regular cinema operation ceased in 2005. Successful grant funding and management changes led to resumption of the cinema provision. More grant funding upgraded projection facilities and since 2025 recently released films are now shown in the Town which are well supported. This shows how the Empire has continued to adapt through its history including live entertainment, community use, low-cost film and event screenings, amateur productions, comedy nights and dementia-friendly activity.

The current Empire Theatre Trust CIO is a volunteer-led charity with a strong local base. Its most recent accounts record a charity operating without paid employees and supported by around 30-40 unpaid volunteers. That volunteer commitment is a strength, but it also shows why the building and operating model need to be made more resilient. The new centre will give volunteers, users and audiences a safer, more flexible and more accessible platform for the future.

Date	Milestone
1915	Opened as a purpose-built cinema, seating around 450 people.
1930s	The arrival of talking pictures changed the programme, with cinema becoming the main focus.
1951	Refurbished with the frontage that remains part of the Empire identity.
1971	Closed as admissions declined in the age of home television.
1978	Reopened by the Halstead Empire Theatre Trust as a cinema and theatre after local efforts to save the venue.
2005 onwards	Regular cinema operation stopped, but live entertainment and community activity continued.

Date	Milestone
2017	In 2017 the cinema Strikes Back Campaign supported a comeback of film screenings and related community focused activities.
2025	Significant funding to enable recent film release to be shown, increase in audiences
2026 project	Opportunity to protect the Empire by adding accessible, flexible arts and community spaces around it.

Why the next chapter matters

The Empire has survived because local people have repeatedly chosen to keep it alive. The challenge now is not simply to preserve a building, but to make it useful, accessible and welcoming for more people. The existing theatre has character and audience loyalty, but it lacks fit for purpose flexible space, access, changing facilities, storage, backstage support and informal meeting areas needed by a modern community arts venue. These will attract a wider cross section of the community

The proposed Community Arts Centre answers this challenge by creating new space around the Empire while respecting the historic signage and the street presence that people recognise. It turns a constrained building into a year-round cultural and community asset.

3. The case for change: community need and evidence

Halstead has a strong sense of community but limited cultural infrastructure. The wider rural area has even fewer options, particularly for those who cannot easily travel to Colchester, Braintree, Chelmsford or other larger centres. A grant-funded arts centre in Halstead would help close that gap by making culture local, affordable and visible.

Current challenges

- Halstead and the northern part of Braintree District have limited dedicated arts, cultural and community space. Existing provision: Braintree (Cinema/The Institute Bocking End, Sudbury (The Arts Centre/ Quay Theatre), Colchester (Cinema. Mercury Theatre)
These provide a variety of opportunities but, as stated elsewhere, due to the large rural area covered sustainable, accessible transport links significantly impact on the ability of residents to access these provisions.
- The Empire Theatre is valued and active, but its age and layout limit accessibility, backstage support, storage, flexible rehearsal space and informal community use.
- The existing building is not fully accessible to people with physical disabilities, mobility impairments, pushchairs or dementia-related needs.
- Rural residents face transport barriers, particularly in the evening when public transport to bigger centres is limited
- Young people need safe, positive and welcoming spaces for social activity, creative learning and informal evening provision.
- The western end of Halstead would benefit from regeneration, increased footfall and a visible civic project that strengthens pride in place. This area of the town is in need of regeneration to improve the environment which will increase footfall and links to the historic Townsford Mill. Pubs and cafes/bars nearby will benefit from passing trade.
- Planned future population growth c13,000 to c20,000 in 10 years will increase pressure on community facilities and widen the gap if no action is taken.
- Sustainability and lifecycle costs must be addressed early so the new centre is affordable to heat, light, maintain and staff over the long term.

Community survey evidence

A community survey undertaken between July and September 2025 received 235 responses, including 197 electronic responses and 38 paper responses. The level of support was strong: more than 90% of respondents said the project was either extremely or very important. Just under 55% described it as extremely important.

Evidence	What it tells us
Survey response	235 total responses: 197 electronic and 38 paper.

Evidence	What it tells us
Importance of project	More than 90% rated the arts centre as extremely or very important.
Regeneration	All but 19 respondents felt the western end of Halstead needs regeneration; more than 120 rated this as extremely or very important.
Requested features	Cafe/bar was the most requested feature, followed by accessibility improvements, exhibition space and larger rehearsal space.
Barriers raised	Cost and parking were the most repeated practical barriers; some respondents also raised concerns about authenticity, management, noise and anti-social behaviour. Mitigations: - The Empire Theatre currently offers excellent quality films at £5 per ticket along with affordable room/space hire and there is no intention to increase this. Indeed, with a larger café/bar provision and longer opening hours it is expected that increased income will continue to support ticket/hire prices. - Management of the Theatre is the responsibility of the Empire Theatre Trust CIO which currently successfully manages the operations and there are no plans to change this although the CIO will need to consider the management model from entirely volunteer led to some alternative model which is in discussion. - Current performances do not negatively impact on noise within the environment and while there will be a greater footfall this is unlikely to have a negative impact. - It is anticipated that anti-social behaviour connected with the Community Arts Centre is likely to be minimised as a result of offering appropriate, welcome activities which encourage pride in place and involvement of the whole cross section of the community.
Climate and sustainability	Around two-thirds of respondents considered climate-friendly and sustainable construction extremely or very important. This is being addressed in the design and construction of the new building and will be incorporated into the existing.
Young people	Ramsey Academy students asked for evening festivals, video gaming sessions, youth club provision and social sessions. Richard de Clare Primary school support the provision as a flexible offering for activities for younger children.

What users told the project team

The most persuasive evidence for funders comes from the people who will use the building. Their feedback shows that the issue is not a lack of enthusiasm. It is a lack of suitable, accessible and flexible space.

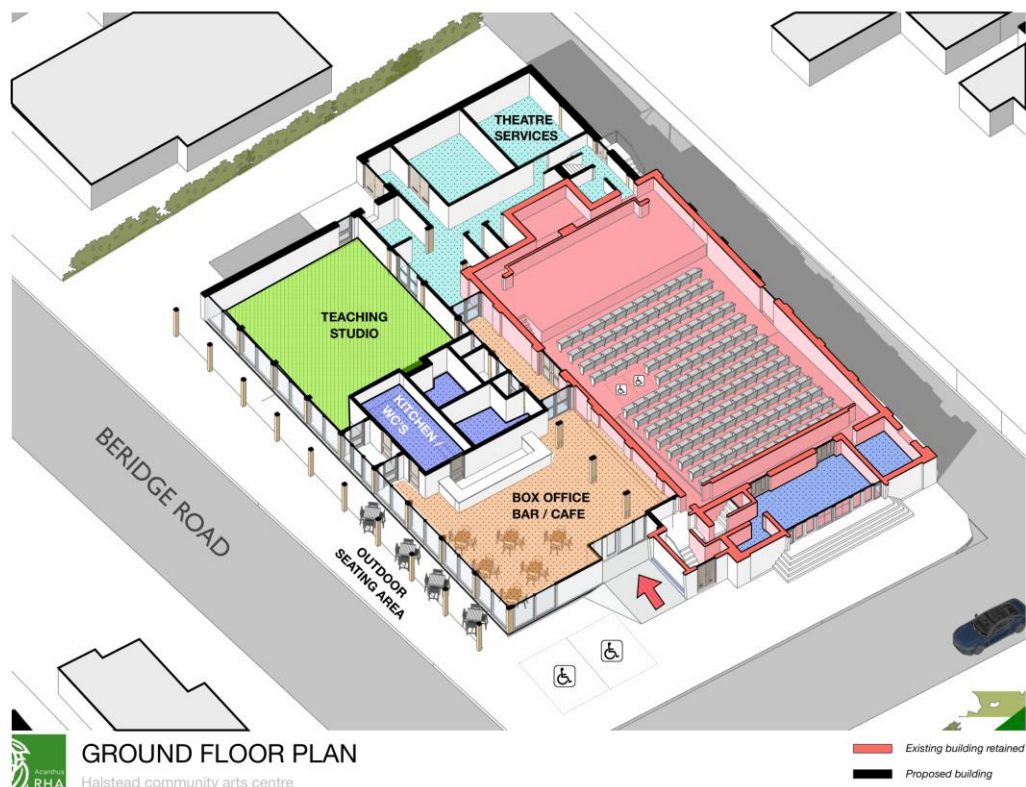
User group	Need identified
Dementia-friendly cinema and choir	Users enjoy the Empire, but access is difficult. Accessible doors, accessible toilets, a warmer route into the building, accessible refreshment space and stage access would make a meaningful difference.
Dance and performance groups	Children and young people need rehearsal, changing and backstage spaces which ensure adequate safeguarding. The existing auditorium can work for audiences, but backstage constraints limit the theatre as a venue for larger dance activity.
Photographic society and artists	Local groups are enthusiastic about exhibition space, creating opportunities for local work to be displayed in a visible town-centre location.
Schools and young people	The Ramsey Academy response supports opportunities to exhibit student work and provide safe social and creative activity. This is also supported by Richard De Clare primary school.
Community groups	Groups such as SEND, history, museum, theatre, dance and social groups need flexible spaces that can support activity without competing with the main auditorium.

Why existing community spaces cannot meet the full need

Halstead has existing halls and community spaces, but none provide the combined offer proposed here: theatre, flexible arts studio, exhibition area, cafe/bar, accessible toilets, back-of-house support, storage, informal meeting space and a clear arts identity in one place. Existing spaces remain important, but they do not remove the need for a dedicated community arts centre linked to the Empire.

4. The project: what will be built and why it matters

The proposed centre sits immediately beside the Empire Theatre on underused land extending to the side and rear of the building. The project material describes a current site made up of a car wash facility on a short-term lease, a car park and temporary buildings. The land is owned and externally maintained by Halstead Town Council, with the intention that the completed centre will be managed and operated through the Empire Theatre Trust arrangements. It is expected that the new spaces will be available for longer opening hours from say, 1000 to 2200, with a core provision of 1000-1800 for the public spaces.



Sheet 3

Ground floor design study showing the relationship between the existing theatre and the proposed new spaces. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, 15 April 2026.

Design approach

The Acanthus design studies set out a scheme that retains the existing Empire building while adding a new extension that is clearer, more accessible and more flexible. The design approach includes removal of existing temporary or unsuitable structures, retention of the original Empire sign and Horn House due to their significance, relocation of WCs out of the main theatre space, and the creation of a simpler route from a new main entrance through to toilets, the theatre and multi-use spaces.

The design aims to create positive street frontage, particularly along Beridge Road, with glazing that gives a visual link between the street and internal activity. This is important for grant funders because it makes the building more than an internal venue. It becomes visible civic infrastructure: a place that signals welcome, safety and activity.

The design stage should also make sustainability visible to funders. This means testing fabric-first improvements, efficient servicing, renewable energy options, material choices, water management, storage, maintenance access and future adaptability before costs are fixed. The aim is not only to build a new space, but to create a building that remains affordable, comfortable and useful in 40 years' time.

Design component	Community benefit
Main entrance, box office, cafe/bar and seating	Creates a warm welcome, daytime use, informal meeting space, visitor spend and a social heart for the building, from breakfast to early evening drinks and refreshments
Flexible dance/teaching studio	Provides bookable space for classes, rehearsals, workshops, youth sessions, dance, fitness, arts learning and community activity.
Exhibition/potential arts area	Gives local artists, schools and heritage groups somewhere to display work and tell local stories.
Moderns WCs and accessible facilities	Improves dignity, access and usability for disabled people, older people, families and dementia-friendly groups.
Theatre services, stores and green room	Improves back-of-house operation, performer welfare, safeguarding, storage and event quality.
First-floor meeting room and storage	Supports governance, small groups, training, volunteers, hires and practical operational needs.

Design component	Community benefit
Outdoor seating and visible frontage	Extends the welcome into the street, creates footfall and improves the feel of the western end of the town.



View from Beridge Road, showing the proposed glazed and active frontage. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, 15 April 2026.



Proposed aerial view showing the relationship between the new centre and the existing theatre. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, 15 April 2026.

Option appraisal

Option	Strengths	Limitations
Do nothing	No upfront capital investment.	Unmet need remains; access problems continue; s106/community funding opportunity may be lost; no response to population growth or youth/community need.
Develop the Community Arts Centre - recommended	Creates dedicated, accessible, flexible cultural and community space; supports regeneration; builds on the Empire; broad public benefit; enables long-term sustainability.	Requires capital funding, careful governance, planning, construction management and early operating reserve.
Renovate the existing Empire only	Uses the existing building and may be faster for small improvements.	The historic layout limits flexibility; costs and disruption could be high; it would not provide the full range of modern community arts spaces needed.

5. Arts, culture and community programme

The building is a means to an end. The end is participation: more people taking part in arts, culture, learning and community life in Halstead. The programme should be designed around a mix of paid, subsidised and free/low-cost activities so that the centre is inclusive without becoming financially fragile.

Programme area	Examples of activity
Performing arts and theatre	Amateur and professional productions, touring acts, comedy, tribute nights, theatre rehearsal, youth performance, dance showcases, open mic nights, concerts, lectures, gaming events and technical training.
Film and streamed culture	Low-cost film screenings, National Theatre Live-style screenings, dementia-friendly cinema and special community screenings.
Visual arts and exhibitions	Local artist exhibitions, photographic society displays, school shows, heritage displays and open-call community art.
Learning and workshops	Drama, dance, music, creative writing, digital creativity, vlogging, gaming-related creative sessions, crafts and family workshops.
Wellbeing and social connection	Dementia choir, warm/cool community hub activity, social prescribing partnerships, older people sessions, low-pressure community meet-ups.
Young people	Safe evening activity, youth advisory board, creative projects, gaming/social sessions, festivals, skills workshops and volunteer pathways.
Community use and civic activity	Meetings, local forums, charity events, consultation, exhibitions on local issues, small conferences and fundraising events.

A programme designed for funder outcomes

Connection to Arts Council England strategy

The project has been explicitly mapped to Arts Council England's Let's Create Strategy 2020-2030. The proposed centre reflects the strategy's core vision: that everyone should have the chance for their creativity to flourish and access high-quality cultural experiences. It also responds directly to the three Let's Create outcomes - Creative People, Cultural Communities and A Creative and Cultural Country - because it combines everyday participation, community-led place-making and support for artists, performers and creative skills.

This draft also recognises that Arts Council England has now published its Strategic Framework 2026, replacing Let's Create as its current guide for funding decisions while a new strategy is developed. The Centre's case still fits strongly: it supports excellence, delivers for everybody and reaches a town and rural catchment with limited cultural infrastructure.

Arts Council reference	How Halstead Community Arts Centre responds
Creative People	The centre will support people of all ages to develop creativity through workshops, exhibitions, youth sessions, dementia-friendly activity, dance, theatre, film, photography, music, technical theatre and volunteer learning.
Cultural Communities	Culture will be created by and with local people, not simply presented to them. The venue will help shape the western end of Halstead as a more active, welcoming and confident place.
A Creative and Cultural Country	The project creates space for local artists, visiting performers, student exhibitions, production skills and future creative careers, while retaining a distinctive local identity.
Ambition & Quality	The design provides professional-standard, flexible spaces linked to an established theatre, with a programme that can grow in quality as partnerships mature.
Dynamism	A demand led flexible operating model, diversified income, digital storytelling, patron advocacy and community partnerships will help the organisation adapt over time.
Environmental Responsibility	Sustainability is a core objective through energy efficiency, renewable energy feasibility, lower-carbon operation, monitoring and responsible procurement.
Inclusivity & Relevance	Access, affordability, dementia-friendly provision, SEND/neurodiverse participation, rural transport and youth voice are built into the programme and design.
Strategic Framework 2026	The project can evidence excellence through quality facilities and creative ambition; deliver for everybody through access and affordability; and reach everywhere by serving Halstead and surrounding rural communities.
Funder outcome	How the project contributes
Widening participation in arts and culture	Low-cost and free/subsidised opportunities; local exhibitions; young people and older people included; rural communities targeted.
Reducing isolation and improving wellbeing	Dementia-friendly activity, warm hub/community hub use, volunteering, informal cafe meeting space and social prescribing partnerships.
Supporting children and young people	Safe evening activities, creative workshops, student exhibitions, youth voice and skills pathways in technical theatre and arts production.
Supporting local creative talent	Affordable rehearsal and exhibition space, performance opportunities, artist-led workshops and connections with school's/community groups.
Strengthening place and pride	Visible regeneration at the western end of Halstead, protection of the Empire story and a new reason to visit the town centre.
Building long-term resilience	Diversified income, better facilities, improved access, better storage and a realistic reserves plan.
A centre for making as well as watching The strength is not only that audiences will attend a wide variety of cultural and social events. It is that local people will have somewhere to make, rehearse, learn, display, volunteer, gather and belong. See Appendix E For a list of groups supporting the project.	

6. Access, inclusion and community engagement

Accessibility is at the heart of the case. The current Empire offers valued activity, but its layout makes participation harder for some people. For funders, the access argument is central: the project will allow people who are currently excluded, inconvenienced or made to feel secondary to participate with dignity. [A community engagement plan is](#)

being prepared that will use social media, newspapers, in-person displays, visits to groups, schools, youth centre, food bank, CAB and through Community Connections to both consult and involve all groups within the community.

Inclusion priorities

- **Disabled access:** clearer entrances, accessible toilets, disabled parking, level routes where possible and improved access, including a lift, between new and existing spaces.
- **Dementia-friendly provision:** a warmer and easier route into the building, better refreshment arrangements, accessible performance participation and storage for activity materials.
- **Children and families:** pram-friendly access, safe gathering space, family workshops, young people activities and improved backstage/changing provision.
- **Neurodivergent and SEND users:** flexible spaces, quieter sessions, predictable routes, partnership with local groups and careful programme design.
- **Rural access:** partnerships with community transport, car share, active travel and better coordination around events.
- **Affordability:** a pricing policy that protects low-cost community access and avoids pricing out regular local users.

Community co-design

The project has already undertaken community consultation through online and paper surveys, face-to-face consultation at Halstead Library, United Reformed Church, Halstead Summer Fayre, Tesco and Queens Hall, and direct engagement with current and potential user groups. The next stage should maintain that approach, with particular emphasis on groups who are less likely to respond to standard surveys: young people, disabled residents, carers, lower-income households, rural residents and diverse communities.

Engagement mechanism	Purpose
Youth advisory board	Gives young people a real voice in programme design, pricing, opening times, safeguarding and the feel of the building.
Access user group	Tests plans with disabled people, carers, dementia-friendly users and families before final specification.
Artists and community groups forum	Shapes hire terms, exhibition policy, rehearsal access, storage needs and collaborative programming.
Schools partnership	Creates regular exhibitions, workshops, work experience and technical theatre opportunities.
Rural outreach	Engages surrounding villages and transport partners so the centre serves more than those within walking distance.
Underdog Crew youth media team	Involves neurodiverse young people in film, photography, interviews and social media so the project is documented and promoted through youth-led creative voices.

Underdog Crew partnership: neurodiverse youth voice and creative media

The project will include input from The Underdog Crew CIC, whose work focuses on empowering young people through creative arts, music and filmmaking, including young people with SEND and neurodiverse young people. Their involvement gives the project a practical way to put young people into the story of the build, not only as future users but as makers, documenters and ambassadors.

The Underdog Crew has been invited to produce a film and photographic record of the project from start to finish, including the existing site, design development, construction milestones, volunteer stories, heritage material, opening activity and early community use. This will create an archive for Halstead, a funder evaluation resource and a visible pathway for young people to gain confidence and creative skills.

They will also help develop and manage a social media presence aimed at a diverse range of people, using accessible, youth-friendly and community-led content. This is especially important for residents who do not currently see the Empire as being for them, and for younger audiences who are more likely to discover local opportunities online.

Link: [The Underdog Crew CIC](#)

Underdog Crew role	Grant-funder benefit
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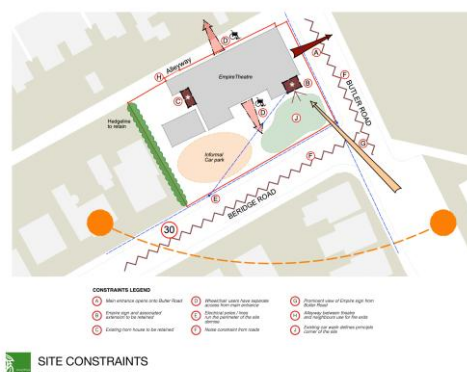
Film and photographic record	Documents the journey from underused site to open community arts centre, creating evidence of delivery and a lasting community archive.
Neurodiverse youth participation	Creates meaningful creative roles for young people who may face barriers to mainstream opportunities.
Social media and digital storytelling	Reaches younger, diverse and less engaged audiences in a voice that is more immediate and accessible.
Skills and confidence	Supports filmmaking, photography, interviewing, editing, marketing and communication skills.
Evaluation and legacy	Provides funders with human stories, visual evidence, interviews and participation material that can sit alongside financial reporting.

7. Regeneration, local economy and place impact

The Community Arts Centre can be a practical catalyst for the western end of Halstead. It will bring people into the area during the day, evening and weekend, creating footfall that benefits nearby shops, cafes, pubs and services. More importantly, it will give residents a visible sign that regeneration is not only about new buildings, but about people, pride and shared experience. Day time public transport is readily available with buses to/from Sudbury, Braintree, Colchester and surrounding villages along with Digigo demand transport. However as previously stated transport after early evening is very limited, certainly not supporting rural villages. An application will be made to Transport Essex for evening provision for rural villages which will support the Town's wider aims to improve sustainable transport.



Existing side/rear site context. The proposal turns underused land into a visible public-benefit asset.



Site constraints and opportunities identified by Acanthus, including the existing Empire, access points, highways and potential public frontage.

Impact area	Expected contribution
Town-centre vitality	A year-round programme brings more reasons to visit the western end of Halstead beyond one-off evening events.
Local spend	Audiences, participants, families, volunteers and visitors create secondary spend in nearby businesses. It is anticipated that the new facilities will increase daily footfall by 100% over time.
Jobs and skills	The project supports paid roles, volunteering, creative work, technical training, hospitality skills and freelance opportunities.
Place identity	The Empire story becomes a bridge between Halstead heritage and a contemporary community future.
Confidence and civic pride	A successful grant-funded project can show that Halstead is investing in local people and cultural infrastructure.

The regeneration case should remain grounded. The centre will not solve all town-centre challenges on its own. Its value is that it creates a strong, visible anchor for community activity, a reason for visitors to stay longer, and a venue where local stories, creativity and civic conversations can be shared.

8. Governance, delivery partners and readiness

Trustees and partners are confident that the project can be delivered and then operated responsibly. The project benefits from a partnership between the developing Foundation CIC, the Empire Theatre Trust CIO and Halstead Town Council.

Partner	Role
Empire Community Art Centre Development Foundation CIC	Project development vehicle. Registration awaited. (June 2026) Trustee group includes experience in planning, surveying, charity governance, legal advice, banking and local town knowledge.
Empire Theatre Trust CIO - Charity No. 1178975	Existing theatre charity. Provides operational experience, local audience base, volunteer culture, programming insight and future activity support.
Halstead Town Council	Owens and externally maintains the theatre and land, provides staff support, seed funding and relevant project support, and will need to support lease arrangements for the completed site.
Project management	Ingleton Wood has been appointed to be the Project Managers to work in conjunction with Acanthus to complete the provision of the building
The Underdog Crew CIC	Creative media and youth inclusion partner. Supports neurodiverse young people to document the project through film/photography and to build a diverse, youth-facing social media presence.
Patrons - prominent arts and entertainment figures namely: Sam Swainsbury, Malcolm Root, George Courtald with more announcements awaited	Advocacy, profile, credibility, introductions and fundraising support once announcements are approved. The financial forecast does not rely on unconfirmed patron-led income.
Engaging local businesses to provide support	Offers to date received from Sainsbury's and Jackson electrical and ongoing activity is building further relationships with businesses across the Town and wider area

Readiness and dependencies

Area	Status/action
Site control	The theatre and land are owned by Halstead Town Council. Lease arrangements will be finalised for construction and operation.
Design	Acanthus design studies prepared, including site plan, concept diagrams, floor plans, sections and street views.
Planning	Pre-application advice is supportive in principle, subject to formal application, retention of the Empire signage, highways input and contamination survey evidence.
Surveys	Utilities and contamination searches are underway in the source material. Petrol tanks/disused tanks require survey and mitigation.
Funding	Local match/seed commitments identified; main grant strategy now needs to be sequenced with confirmed capital cost plan.
Community support	Survey and consultation evidence shows strong support, with practical concerns around access, cost, parking, authenticity and management to be addressed.

Governance requirements before grant submission

1. The project is being managed by The Halstead Community Arts Centre CIC (Registration due by September 2026). A bank Account is awaiting CIC registration although signatories and other formalities are completed.
2. Agree the final lease, operating responsibilities, insurance responsibilities and maintenance obligations between Halstead Town Council and the Empire Theatre Trust CIO.
3. Approve a scheme of delegation for capital decisions, procurement, conflicts of interest, grant compliance and financial reporting.
4. Obtain updated professional cost advice, including QS cost plan, VAT advice, surveys and risk allowances.
5. Agree whether the cafe/bar will be operated through a trading subsidiary, concession or other ring-fenced arrangement, with professional charity/tax advice.
6. Create a funder reporting framework covering outputs, outcomes, finance, procurement, safeguarding, equality, sustainability and legacy.

Patrons and public profile

The project has promises of support from prominent figures in the arts and entertainment field who have been announced as Patrons. They should provide valuable profile, advocacy, press interest, introductions, special events and donor. The operating forecast does not depend on unconfirmed patron income; instead, patron support is treated as an additional strength in the fundraising and communications strategy.

9. Capital funding strategy and grant case

The funding case is a blended capital campaign. Different funders will be interested in different parts of the project: heritage and building significance; arts participation; community cohesion; youth provision; SEND and neurodiverse participation; access and disability; environmental sustainability; local regeneration; digital storytelling; and equipment. The strongest applications will show how each funder contributes to a shared whole without double-funding the same costs.

Indicative capital budget

Budget line	Amount	Comment
Construction sub-total from Stage 1 estimate	£2,640,000	Main construction work estimate from Architects Stage 1 Proposal Dd 13 th July 2026 Construction value before professional fees, disbursements and VAT.
Professional fees at 9%	£237,600	Architect, project manager, structural, mechanical, electrical and quantity surveying fees in supplied budget.
Disbursements	£43,500	Planning, building regulation, asbestos, investigations, acoustic/thermal calculations, party wall, contracts and CDM allowances.
Contingency at 15%	£438,000	Risk allowance in the supplied budget estimate.
Inflation@2.2%	£74,000	from date of estimate to mid construction
Net total before VAT	£3,433,000	Estimated budget before VAT. Rounded to nearest £1000
VAT at 20%	£686,600	Subject to VAT advice and procurement route.
Overall suggested budget allowance	£4,119,600	Supplied overall suggested budget allowance for the construction scheme.

Source note: Budget figures are taken from the supplied October 2025 Design 2 budget estimate image within the February 2026 project material. They should be validated by an updated QS cost plan before final grant applications.

Additional allowances needed for a fundable whole project

This business case identifies that the construction estimate does not include all fit-out costs or wider work needed to revise the existing building and add sustainability measures. A realistic grant package should therefore include:

- Equipment and furnishing allowance: approximately £200,000 for performance equipment, rehearsal setup, exhibition displays, meeting-room furniture and cafe/bar fit-out.
- Initial operating and mobilisation allowance: approximately £100,000 for pre-opening staff, utilities, marketing, training, launch programming and early working capital.
- Sustainability and access enhancement allowance: currently estimated at £300,000-£800,000, subject to feasibility and design, for measures such as solar panels, batteries, heating/ventilation efficiency and improvements to the existing building.
- Survey, planning and risk allowances: to be kept live until contamination, utilities, highways, ecology, asbestos and detailed design work are complete.

Funding package line	Working estimate
Core construction allowance incl. VAT	£2,692,800
Fit-out and equipment allowance	£200,000
Mobilisation/opening support allowance	£100,000
Core capital and launch package	£4,119,600
Potential sustainability/access enhancement range	£300,000 - £800,000
Indicative full package range	£4,519,600 - £5,019,600
Identified local match/seed commitments	£523,000 subject to confirmation
Indicative remaining external grant/fundraising requirement	£3,996,660 - £4,496,660 for full package

Suggested fundraising sequence

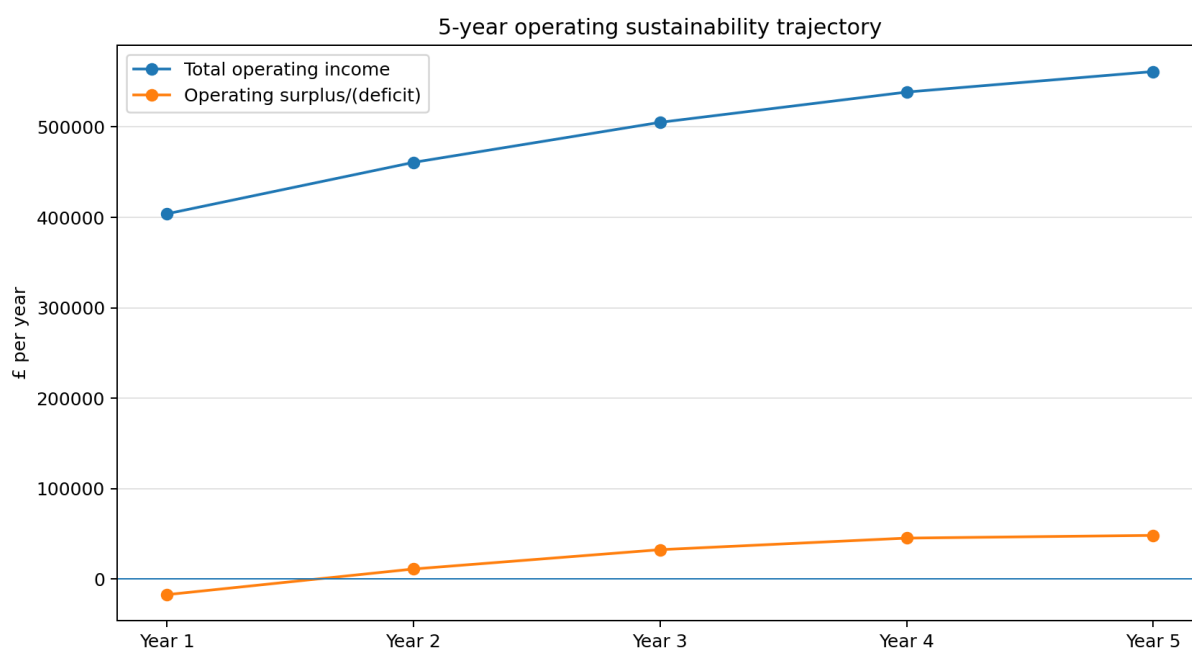
1. Confirm project governance, lease position, cost plan and VAT/procurement strategy.
2. Secure formal release/confirmation of local s106 and Town Council contributions as match funding.
3. Submit development-stage or project-enquiry applications to major funders, using the community evidence and design material now available.
4. Approach major arts, heritage and community funders for the core capital package once cost plan and permissions are sufficiently advanced.
5. Package smaller funders around specific elements: accessibility, environmental sustainability, youth and neurodiverse creative media, dementia-friendly provision, equipment, exhibition infrastructure, volunteer training and social media/digital storytelling.
6. Launch community fundraising later in the process, when the main package is credible and local giving can be directed to named items without undervaluing long-life assets.

10. Operating model and 5-year financial forecast

The operating forecast is included to give funders confidence that the completed building will not become dependent on indefinite revenue subsidy. It is deliberately not over-optimistic. The model assumes a realistic Year 1 ramp-up, a small opening-year deficit, break-even in Year 2 and a gradual rebuilding of reserves.

The forecast is a consolidated operating view of the Community Arts Centre charity and a potential wholly owned cafe/bar trading subsidiary. It excludes capital build costs, depreciation, finance costs, VAT recovery and grant accounting. Those should be modelled separately once the capital plan and legal/procurement structure are confirmed.

Year	Total income	Direct costs	Operating costs	Operating surplus/(deficit)	Closing operating reserve
Year 1	£403,900	£187,221	£234,000	(£17,321)	£62,679
Year 2	£460,800	£205,182	£244,570	£11,048	£73,727
Year 3	£505,100	£217,059	£255,624	£32,417	£106,144
Year 4	£538,600	£226,184	£267,184	£45,232	£151,376
Year 5	£561,300	£233,782	£279,273	£48,245	£199,621



Base-case operating forecast. Capital build costs, depreciation, finance costs, VAT and grant accounting are excluded from the operating model.

Key interpretation

- Year 1 shows a planned operating deficit of approximately £17,300. This is realistic for a new centre while room hire, programme use and cafe/bar trade build.
- Break-even is reached in Year 2, with a forecast surplus of approximately £11,000.
- By Year 5, the model produces an operating surplus of approximately £48,200, equivalent to an operating margin of around 8.6%.
- The model assumes an £80,000 opening working-capital reserve. The lowest closing operating reserve is approximately £62,700, slightly above the modelled 3-month reserve requirement for Year 1.
- The 5-year cumulative operating surplus is approximately £119,600, supporting reserve rebuilding and lifecycle maintenance, improved sustainability, potential travel incentives, and/or big-ticket promotions if required.

Operating assumptions

Assumption	Basis
Programme income	Grows from £222,900 in Year 1 to £264,300 in Year 5, reflecting stronger use of the auditorium and a broader event programme.
Room/studio/community hire	Grows from £25,000 in Year 1 to £72,000 in Year 5 as the new studio, meeting room and community spaces become established.
Cafe/bar sales	Grows from £150,000 in Year 1 to £215,000 in Year 5, treated as a support service and controlled trading activity rather than the primary purpose.
Fundraising/sponsorship/donations	Grows modestly from £6,000 to £10,000 per year, excluding capital grants.
Staffing	Includes charity staff and cafe/bar staff with on-costs; assumes paid staffing is needed to support a reliable seven-day asset alongside volunteers.
Repairs and renewal	Includes an annual repairs, maintenance and asset renewal allowance, rising from £23,000 to £27,957.
Reserves	Uses a minimum recommended reserve equal to approximately three months of operating costs.

Scenario stress test

Year	Base case surplus/(deficit)	Downside surplus/(deficit)	Outsourced cafe/bar fallback
Year 1	(£17,321)	(£53,655)	(£10,671)
Year 2	£11,048	(£31,831)	£11,364
Year 3	£32,417	(£16,596)	£25,145
Year 4	£45,232	(£8,338)	£32,674
Year 5	£48,245	(£8,122)	£33,938

The downside scenario demonstrates why funders and trustees should require a realistic opening reserve, early warning indicators and the ability to change course. Under a stressed income scenario, the centre would need corrective action. The outsourced cafe/bar scenario provides a credible fallback if in-house trading creates too much risk or management burden.

Relationship with the existing Empire and local comparator evidence

The existing Empire accounts show both the strength and fragility of the current model. The 2024 accounts recorded total income of approximately £136,900, expenditure of approximately £168,600 and net expenditure of approximately £31,700, with year-end unrestricted funds of approximately £84,400. This is not a reason to avoid investment. It is evidence that the present building and model need strengthening through better facilities, diversified income and a realistic reserves policy.

The accounts of local charity provide a useful local comparator for a community facility with bar/cafe activity, hire, clubs and public benefit. They show that cafe/bar income can be material, but also that staffing, energy, repairs and trading costs must be controlled. This business case therefore treats trading income as useful but not risk-free.

11. Marketing, audiences and participation

The audience development strategy should feel local first, but not small. The centre should build from the trust already held by the Empire, while reaching people who do not currently see the theatre as being for them. The marketing message is simple: this is Halstead's place to watch, make, meet and belong.

Audience	Approach
Existing Empire audiences	Protect and improve the current theatre, film, comedy, live screening and amateur performance audiences through better facilities and hospitality.
Families and young people	Use schools, youth groups, social media, festivals, low-cost workshops and youth advisory board activity.
Older and isolated residents	Promote dementia-friendly screenings, choir, daytime cafe/community hub use and transport support.
Artists and creative groups	Affordable rehearsal, exhibition and workshop offers; open calls; studio hire; local arts network.
Community organisations	Clear room-hire pricing, community rates, partnership packages and accessible facilities.
Visitors and rural communities	Programme special events, seasonal festivals, local heritage exhibitions and partnerships with surrounding villages.
Digital and diverse audiences	Underdog Crew-led film, photography, social media, interviews and behind-the-scenes content to reach younger people and people not currently connected to the Empire.
Supporters, donors and wider networks	Use Patrons, local champions, business sponsors and community ambassadors to build trust, profile and fundraising momentum once public announcements are made.

Participation principles

- Keep at least part of the programme free or low-cost, with transparent community rates.
- Use the cafe/bar as a welcome point, not a barrier to participation. There is an opportunity to incorporate a loyalty scheme and/or pay it forward offer to support increased footfall and also social inclusion.
- Programme daytime, evening and weekend activity to serve different audiences.
- Make volunteering visible, supported and valued, with training in front-of-house, technical theatre, heritage, exhibitions.
- Collect participation data in a respectful way so funders can see who benefits and where barriers remain.
- Use the Underdog Crew partnership to create youth-led film, photography and social media content throughout the project, helping the centre speak in a warmer, more diverse and more contemporary voice.
- Use Patrons sensitively once announced: not as celebrity decoration, but as advocates who can open doors, raise confidence, encourage new audiences and support the artistic credibility of the project.

12. Environmental, social and financial sustainability, transport and accessibility

Sustainability is one of the project's central promises. It is environmental, social, cultural, operational and financial. The Centre should be low-cost to run, responsible in its use of energy and materials, accessible to people who face barriers, resilient enough to maintain, and flexible enough to keep serving Halstead as needs change.

Sustainability objectives

For grant funders, the sustainability case should be stated repeatedly and consistently: the capital project must create a building and operating model that protect the public investment for the long term.

Sustainability strand	Commitment
Environmental sustainability	Commission/complete an energy and sustainability feasibility study; prioritise fabric-first energy reduction; test solar PV, battery storage, efficient heating/hot water, LED lighting, water-saving fittings and sustainable drainage/landscape measures.
Financial sustainability	Use the 5-year operating forecast, opening working-capital reserve, realistic staffing, controlled cafe/bar risk and planned lifecycle maintenance to avoid dependence on indefinite revenue subsidy.
Social sustainability	Keep part of the programme free or low-cost, maintain dementia-friendly activity, support young people and carers, offer welcoming informal space and develop community transport/rural access.
Cultural sustainability	Protect the Empire story while creating new space for contemporary arts, exhibitions, local talent, creative skills and future generations of volunteers and audiences.

Operational sustainability	Design storage, servicing, volunteer support, safeguarding, maintenance access and energy monitoring into the operating plan from the start.
Digital sustainability	Use the Underdog Crew film/photography/social media record to build an archive, evidence impact and maintain public engagement during and after construction.
Access issue	Project response
Public transport	Halstead has daytime bus connections to Braintree, Witham, Sudbury and Colchester, but evening services are limited. Programme times and transport support should reflect this.
Rail access	Nearest rail options include Chappel and Wakes Colne, Braintree and Witham, with limited onward evening bus links.
Parking	A survey of evening parking at Butler Road and Chapel Street car parks identified approximately 90 available spaces before evening performances, with further on-street options nearby subject to highways advice.
Accessible parking	The design studies show accessible parking opportunities close to the entrance. Final design should protect this.
Community transport	Explore minibus, shuttle, volunteer driver and community transport partnerships for rural residents and access groups.
Active travel	Provide safe cycle parking, car-share encouragement and consider EV charging where feasible.

Environmental measures to test

- Solar PV and battery storage where roof orientation and structural capacity allow.
- High-quality insulation, efficient glazing and careful ventilation to reduce energy use while protecting comfort.
- Low-energy lighting and controls across new and existing spaces.
- Efficient heating and hot-water systems, subject to whole-building feasibility.
- Water-saving fittings and sustainable drainage/landscape improvements where feasible.
- A building management approach that monitors energy use and reports improvement to funders.

A feasibility study will be undertaken into energy efficiency and sustainability measures for both the existing building and the extension. That study should be brought forward early because it can strengthen applications to environmental, theatre improvement and capital funders.

Sustainability should also be protected through procurement. Tender documentation should ask contractors and suppliers to explain how they will reduce waste, manage materials responsibly, support local supply chains where appropriate, and avoid value-engineering out environmental or access features that are central to the grant case.

A simple annual sustainability report should be produced once the centre is operating. It can track energy use, renewable generation if installed, water use, waste, transport initiatives, accessible participation, affordability and maintenance. This will give funders confidence that sustainability is being managed rather than merely promised.

13. Risk management

This motivating grant case must still be honest about risk. The Trustees know that funders will expect the project team to understand the risks and to show credible mitigation. The key point is that the risks are manageable if they are faced early, costed properly and governed transparently.

Risk	Rating	Mitigation
Planning and statutory approvals	Medium	Use supportive pre-application advice; maintain dialogue with Braintree District Council and Essex Highways; retain Empire signage; submit full evidence package.
Capital cost inflation	High	Update QS cost plan; maintain contingency; phase non-critical works; avoid unfunded scope creep; secure fixed-price tenders where appropriate.
Contamination/petrol tanks/utilities	High	Complete Tier 1 contamination survey and utilities investigations before final budget; hold risk allowance.
Funding shortfall	High	Use phased fundraising strategy; secure local match; package costs by funder priority; plan fallback phasing.
Opening-year operating deficit	Medium	Open with working-capital reserve; pre-sell hires; build programme before opening; monitor monthly.
Cafe/bar trading underperformance	Medium	Use trading subsidiary or concession; set margin targets; trigger outsourced fallback if needed.

Risk	Rating	Mitigation
Volunteer capacity	Medium	Add paid coordination where needed; train volunteers; avoid over-reliance on a small number of people.
Access objectives diluted during value engineering	Medium	Treat access as core scope, not optional enhancement; involve access user group.
Community concerns over parking/noise/anti-social behaviour	Medium	Prepare management plan, neighbour communications, event controls and transport plan.
Grant compliance and reporting burden	Medium	Set up reporting systems early; appoint responsible lead; align KPIs with funder outcomes.
Sustainability measures under-scoped or value engineered out	High	Complete feasibility work early; identify non-negotiable sustainability/access features; ring-fence specific grant lines; evaluate tenders on whole-life value, not only lowest capital price.
Youth media partnership safeguarding and delivery	Medium	Agree clear brief, permissions, safeguarding, consent, data protection and editorial sign-off with The Underdog Crew and project governance before filming or social media output begins.
Patron announcements delayed or roles unclear	Low/Medium	Do not depend on Patron income in the forecast; agree role descriptions and permissions before naming Patrons; use them as an enhancement to advocacy and fundraising, not a core dependency.

14. Implementation plan

The implementation plan should remain flexible until planning, funding and procurement routes are confirmed. The source business case proposes a construction start around March 2028. The following plan turns that into a funder-friendly sequence of decisions, permissions and mobilisation.

Phase	Indicative timing	Key activities
Phase 1: Design, surveys and planning	0-9 months	Finalise brief, undertake surveys, confirm access/sustainability requirements, obtain planning permission and building control route.
Phase 2: Funding and partnerships	6-18 months	Secure s106/Town Council commitments, major grant approvals, sponsorship, smaller grants and partnership letters.
Phase 3: Procurement and mobilisation	9-18 months	Confirm procurement route, tender works, agree contracts, finalise lease/legal documents and project governance.
Phase 4: Construction and fit-out	18-30 months	Build extension, connect to existing theatre, install access improvements, fit-out, test systems and complete snagging.
Phase 5: Staff/volunteer training and pre-opening programme	Final 3-6 months	Recruit key staff, train volunteers, pre-sell hires, confirm programme, prepare policies and operational systems.
Phase 6: Launch and first-year evaluation	Opening year	Soft launch, community opening, funder recognition, monthly financial review, participation monitoring and evaluation reporting.
Cross-cutting sustainability gateway	Before final tender and again before opening	Confirm sustainability specification, lifecycle cost assumptions, energy monitoring, maintenance plan, access commitments, transport actions and funder reporting measures before contracts and opening plans are finalised.
Digital documentation and community storytelling	From pre-construction to first year of operation	Work with The Underdog Crew to film and photograph milestones, collect local voices, produce social media content and create an accessible archive/evaluation record.

Immediate next actions

1. Approve this revised grant-focused business case as the working narrative for funders.
2. Commission/update QS cost plan and VAT/procurement advice.
3. Confirm the legal status of the development CIC and lease/operating arrangements.
4. Complete contamination, utilities and access/sustainability feasibility work.
5. Create a funder evidence pack with survey results, letters of support, design drawings, photographs, accounts and financial forecast.

6. Prepare first-stage enquiries to major funders, with the funding ask split into core capital, access, sustainability, fit-out and programme launch components.

15. Monitoring, evaluation and legacy

Grant funders will want to know how success will be measured. The centre should measure not only ticket sales and room hire, but also who takes part, what changes for them, and how the building strengthens the town.

Outcome area	Measures
Participation	Attendances, workshop participants, exhibition visitors, repeat use, first-time users and rural participation.
Access and inclusion	Disabled users, dementia-friendly sessions, access improvements delivered, subsidised places, affordability feedback.
Young people	Youth sessions, school partnerships, youth advisory board participation, student exhibitions, skills/volunteer hours.
Artists and community groups	Number of local artists/groups supported, exhibitions held, rehearsal hours, community hires and partnership projects.
Volunteering	Volunteer numbers, training hours, retention, technical/front-of-house skills gained.
Financial resilience	Operating surplus/deficit, reserves, cafe/bar margin, room utilisation, fundraising and maintenance reserve.
Environmental performance	Energy use, generation from renewable systems where installed, utility costs, carbon reduction indicators.
Place impact	Town-centre footfall proxies, visitor feedback, business/community feedback and perception of west Halstead regeneration.
Environmental sustainability	Energy use, renewable energy generation if installed, water use, waste reduction, active travel/cycle use, transport pilots, annual sustainability report and maintenance actions.
Digital storytelling and diverse reach	Film/photographic record completed, social media reach and engagement, youth media participants, interviews captured, accessibility of content and use of material in funder reporting.
Patron and supporter engagement	Patrons announced, advocacy activity, introductions, events, donor engagement, press coverage and supporter conversion, tracked without assuming guaranteed income.

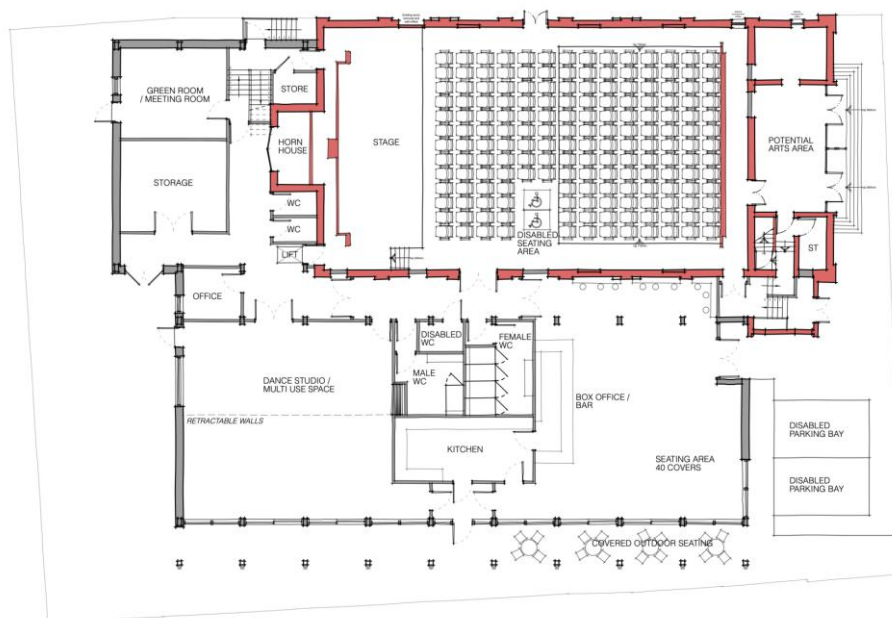
Legacy

The legacy of this project should be a building that is loved and used, but also a stronger community culture: more people confident to take part, more young people with somewhere positive to go, more local artists seen, more older residents connected, more volunteers skilled, and a town better able to tell its own story.

The Empire has survived because Halstead has kept choosing it. Grant funding now offers the chance to turn that affection into a practical, accessible and sustainable future - one that is greener to run, stronger to govern, more inclusive to use and better able to carry local creativity into the next generation.

Appendix A. Design drawings and photographs

The following images are included to help grant funders understand the existing place, the proposed design and the relationship between the Empire and the new community arts spaces.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

Halstead community arts centre

Sheet 4

Ground floor plan showing teaching studio, box office/bar/cafe, kitchen/WCs, theatre services and relationship to the retained auditorium. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, 15 April 2026.



VIEW FROM BUTLER ROAD

Halstead community arts centre

Sheet 10

View from Butler Road, showing how the extension sits alongside the existing Empire frontage. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, 15 April 2026.



Sheet 11

View from Beridge Road, showing the proposed active frontage. Source: Acanthus RH Architects LLP, 15 April 2026.

Appendix B. Community-space provision in Halstead

Facility	Current role and limitation
Queens Hall	Large hall, around 17m x 6.5m, seating up to around 100, modular stage, projector and small kitchen; parking limited to around 12 cars.
United Reformed Church Hall	Approximately 6.5m x 12m, suitable for weddings, concerts and events; parking available onsite or nearby.
Community Shed	Approximately 6m x 6m, used for Men's Shed and community health activity; currently at capacity with limited parking.
St Andrews Hall	Traditional church hall with stage, around 6m x 10m, space for around 100, little parking.
Baptist Church Hall	Approximately 10m x 4m; upstairs and therefore not suitable for all disabled users; parking available.
Gap identified	No existing facility combines flexible arts studio, exhibition, accessible community meeting space, theatre support, cafe/bar, back-of-house provision and Empire auditorium access.

Appendix C. Funding route map

Potential funder	Likely funder interest	Recommended fit for this project
Arts Council England - Project Grants / cultural development	Arts, museums and libraries projects; activity development, participation, creative programme and launch projects. Applications should be framed against current Arts Council guidance while showing clear fit with the Let's Create outcomes/investment principles and the Strategic Framework 2026 themes.	Use for creative programme, pilot activity, youth/digital storytelling, artist development, community participation and potentially some project costs, depending on current guidance.
National Lottery Heritage Fund	Heritage projects connecting people and communities with heritage; current routes include £10k-£250k and £250k-£10m.	Use for the Empire story, local heritage interpretation, conservation-sensitive works, community history and access to heritage.
National Lottery Community Fund - Reaching Communities England	Projects strengthening communities and improving lives, from £20,001 to £20m.	Use for community hub, inclusion, youth, wellbeing, rural access and community engagement elements.

Potential funder	Likely funder interest	Recommended fit for this project
Theatres Trust	Theatre building improvements, resilience, accessibility, inclusion, sustainability and urgent repair schemes.	Use for theatre-related access, environmental sustainability, resilience, technical/building improvements.
Garfield Weston Foundation	UK charities across welfare, youth, community, environment, education, health, arts, heritage and faith; capital grants often require evidence of local fundraising.	Use for capital contribution, especially once match funding and community support are clear.
Wolfson Foundation	Capital infrastructure for places, including performing arts organisations and performance/training facilities.	Use for performance, training, technical and building facilities where eligibility and artistic programme are strong.
Architectural Heritage Fund	Historic building projects from feasibility through development and capital works.	Use for feasibility/development and heritage-led regeneration elements, subject to eligibility.
Essex Community Foundation and local trusts	Local grants to charities and voluntary/community organisations in Essex.	Use for smaller access, youth, community, volunteer, equipment and outreach packages.
Community fundraising and sponsorship	Buy-a-brick, named spaces/items, local sponsorship and donations.	Use later in the campaign once main funding is credible; price long-life assets carefully.
Youth, SEND and creative media funders	Funders supporting young people, SEND/neurodiverse participation, creative skills, filmmaking, digital storytelling and confidence-building.	Use for Underdog Crew-led film/photography/social media record, youth media training, access support, safeguarding and equipment.
Environmental and energy-efficiency funders	Funders focused on carbon reduction, energy efficiency, renewable energy, climate resilience and lower operating costs for community buildings.	Use for feasibility, solar PV/battery testing, fabric improvements, LED lighting, efficient heating/ventilation, water saving and energy monitoring.
Patron-supported fundraising and major donor cultivation	Not a replacement for capital grants, but a route to profile, introductions, events and match-funding confidence once Patrons are publicly announced.	Use later in the campaign for public profile, named appeals, launch events, donor meetings, press and local business sponsorship.

Appendix D. Source notes and image credits

Source	Use in this business case
February 2026 project business case	HALSTEAD COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE Business Plan February 2026.docx. Used for local need, survey evidence, delivery partners, site context, costs, feedback, current spaces, transport and sustainability.
Acanthus design studies	Acanthus architect 15th April 2026 presentation.pdf. Used for site plan, design concept, ground floor/first floor plans and proposed external views.
Empire Theatre Trust CIO accounts	report and accounts 24 25.pdf. Used for existing trust context, volunteer-led model and 2024 income/expenditure/reserve figures.
Earls Colne Recreation Ground accounts 2025	Used as a local comparator for community facility, cafe/bar, hire, staffing, repairs and operating risk.
5-year financial forecast workbook	Halstead_CAC_5_Year_Forecast.xlsx. Used for base, downside and outsourced operating scenarios.
Wikimedia Commons image	Halstead, The Empire Theatre - geograph.org.uk - 1463370.jpg. Photo by Nigel Cox / Geograph, taken 24 August 2009, licensed CC BY-SA 2.0. Source URL: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Halstead,_The_Empire_Theatre_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1463370.jpg
Official funding sources checked	Arts Council England Project Grants; National Lottery Heritage Fund; National Lottery Community Fund Reaching Communities; Theatres Trust; Garfield Weston Foundation; Wolfson Foundation; Architectural Heritage Fund; Essex Community Foundation.
Arts Council England - Let's Create Strategy 2020-2030	Used to strengthen alignment with the Let's Create vision, Outcomes and Investment Principles, including Environmental Responsibility and Inclusivity & Relevance. Source: Arts Council England Let's Create
Arts Council England - Strategic Framework 2026	Used to cross-check the current Arts Council language around supporting excellence, delivering for everybody and reaching everywhere. Source: Arts Council England Strategic Framework 2026
The Underdog Crew CIC	Used for proposed youth media, neurodiverse participation, filmmaking/photography and social media partnership. Source: underdogcrew.org
Essex Local Offer - The Underdog Crew CIC listing	Used as supporting evidence for Underdog Crew activity with young people, SEND/neurodiversity, filmmaking, photography, creative arts and youth empowerment. Source: Essex Local Offer listing

Note on financials: operating forecast figures are planning estimates for grant discussion. They are not a formal accountant's report, valuation, tax opinion or QS cost plan. Capital costs, VAT recovery, depreciation, financing and grant accounting should be modelled separately once the capital scheme and legal structure are confirmed.

Appendix E Supporters as at August 2026

- **Support.** The project has attracted support from a wide range of people and organisations:
 - Patrons: Malcolm Root and Sam Swainsbury. George Courtauld
 - Community supporters: Stane Street Players, Braintree Foodbank, Friends of Holy Trinity Church, Little Pickles Nursery, Halstead & District Photographic Society, CozFest members, and families supporting children's activities.
 - Arts and theatre supporters: The Theatres Trust; Kit Harington (actor and producer); Rosie Leslie (actor); Owen Calvert-Lyons (Artistic Director, Theatre Royal); Amy Cudden (actor, director and producer, Colchester); Lucy Cudden (actor and producer, Colchester); and others.