



Headway Arts

Facility Requirements Extracts from the Full Report

Prepared by

ArtReach
CONSULTANTS Ltd

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NORTHUMBERLAND
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places for everyone

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1. Background and context

Headway Arts (Headstrong Productions) was formally incorporated in 1995 (originally as Headway Theatre Company) and established as a registered charity, having emerged from the Theatre Station Blyth initiative that operated from The Old Fire Station in Union St.

The company objects are to “advance education for the public benefit by the promotion of the arts, in particular but not exclusively the art of drama”. Headway Arts specialises in participatory arts, providing creative opportunities for people to gain access through the arts which enables personal development and social inclusion. The organisation has a particular aim to engage those who are socially excluded, with a focus on and special expertise at working with young people and adults with learning disability.

Since 1995 Headway Arts has maintained a Blyth base, moving in turn from the old Drill Hall building to shop/office space on Bridge Street and finally to its current home on Quay Rd. It has, in the past, operated a “workshop in a bus” facility which it was able to tour to Festivals and events. The current Headway Arts base comprises:

- Small lobby and downstairs storage area
- First floor meeting and modest workshop space
- Open plan office space and meeting area
- Separate office accommodation for two people
- Kitchen/rest area
- Toilet

The company delivers an award-winning programme which includes an annual *Come on Down Festival*, manages and leads a permanent learning disabled theatre company (Seven Stars), which currently meets four days a week, and runs a youth theatre (Random) which provides opportunities for disadvantaged and hard to reach young people. In addition Headway Arts develops and delivers a range of participatory and performance projects across Northumberland and beyond, and is also engaged in international collaborative work with support from the European Union.

In order to fulfil its current programme Headway Arts needs to rent workshop, activity and rehearsal accommodation in community venues in Blyth. This requirement has become an increasing issue for the company, meaning that the operation is not as efficient and effective as it might be and preventing Headway Arts from maximising its potential. The current base does not meet DDA requirements for access.

Opportunities to address this issue first emerged when major regeneration and redevelopment of the Blyth quayside area was being proposed in 2008. This potential opportunity was a catalyst for Headway Arts to fully explore need, demand and facilities requirements and led to the contracting of ArtReach to undertake development as well as Business Plan support work. However, the recent economic downturn and significant reduction in resources both for the public sector and private development may have serious impact on the short to medium term options available with respect to facilities. In the meantime a robust company Business Plan has been prepared through to 2015 and an application made to Arts Council England for ongoing Portfolio Funding support.

This document identifies in detail the Headway Arts facilities requirements and proposes the appropriate route forward for achieving its ambitions in the light of the current economic climate.

2. Identifying Headway Arts facility needs

Developing the detailed facilities requirements for Headway has been informed by:

- An initial “wish list” prepared by the Headway Arts Chief Executive and core team
- Discussion with Headway Arts Trustees
- Consultation with partners and stakeholders
- Workshop sessions with users and participants
- Comparator review
- ArtReach experience of developing arts buildings (new build and refurbishment/alteration) and a pragmatic approach to funding issues

Wish list

The wish list of the core team is clearly an essential starting point to assess the facility requirements. This has been articulated in *Headway HQ... making space for creativity* with key extracts quoted here:

As well as working in schools, community centres, museums and day centres, Headway Arts offers “in-house” training opportunities to a wide range of groups and individuals. Full-time projects running over six months, leading to increased confidence and self-esteem, are offered to community groups and individuals, learning disabled groups, children, young people, those excluded or at risk of exclusion from full time education, adult education groups and community volunteers. There is an increasing demand for this kind of support. Headway Arts also works with local communities to develop vibrant and exciting festivals and celebratory events which provide positive images of their culture. A recent development for the company has been training for artists and community workers in specialist methods of working with excluded groups. The work continues to grow and is now gaining international recognition, with partnership projects throughout Europe. Headway Art’s annual “Come On Down” Arts Festival for people with learning disabilities attracts over 200 people including audiences and participants from European partner countries.

*The work of Headway Arts has grown steadily over the past 15 years and it continues to develop, constantly reinventing it’s ideas to accommodate the needs of the local communities, but always retaining it’s values and principles. It’s key aims over the next five years are to build on its work and ensure it has the resources necessary to expand its work in line with both demand and current local and regional plans. The demand for projects and support offered is now only restricted by it’s resources. **It needs a base – a beacon in the cultural landscape** - where people are invited, and sometimes challenged, to broaden their horizons and develop the creative power of their imaginations, where the local and regional community can realise, develop and express their natural creativity; a resource which will inspire and incubate a nationally recognised model of good practice of inclusivity; a dynamic cultural attractor which will allow residents to access a diverse range of cultural events and recognise Headway Art’s commitment to local and regional structures. **Our vision would be to create a landmark building in Blyth which would reach out to the rest of the region and be a Centre of Excellence for Arts and Social Inclusion.***

We envisage a new building incorporating innovative use of community art in the design process and ecofriendly use of materials in the build. The building should be experimental and reflect Blyth’s status as the national centre of renewable energy. It is preferable for the Headway Arts base to be in Blyth though consideration would be given to an alternative Blyth Valley location.

The Headway HQ should contain:

- **A studio theatre space** (taking the height of two floors) with a balcony for technical facilities. Ideally this would be a large multi use space for one off shows or regional festivals; community events, conferences, meetings and for training, rehearsal and performances. It needs to be a flexible space with optional black out and might include bar area and cafe style seating rather than raked seating to make it easier for people with mobility issues. There needs to be appropriate access for loading.
- **Training rooms** – large enough to use for workshops and training; multi use areas which could be hired out for community use on sessional basis. Rooms could each have a different purpose e.g. recording space with soundproofing and technical area; art room with wet area; room with overhead projector etc.
- **Office space** meeting the needs of Headway and Seven Stars Learning Disabled Theatre with additional office space for outside agencies.
- **Cafe** needing independent access for out of hours trading.
- **Exhibition Area** for public displays of work by the community.
- **Early Years Centre for Creativity** – an area with independent access to run as a children’s creative centre. Will need to be a good size, discreet and independent area with toilets and changing facilities and kitchen.

Trustee input to wish list

In a focused discussion to explore facility requirements Headway Arts’ Trustees added some specific ingredients and description to the wish list:

- The Headway Arts facility needs to be secure and safe – a place where those who normally feel excluded are able to access
- It needs to be available to everyone in the community (a “Pandora’s box of potential where no-one is excluded”), breaking down barriers
- A place that inspires creativity and enables personal development
- A place that contributes to making Blyth a destination worth coming to
- A base that raises the profile of Headway Arts
- A place where creativity spills outside and where the creativity of the building can be seen from outside
- A place that is a springboard for Headway Arts’ work elsewhere in the community and across the county

Consultation with partners and stakeholders

ArtReach has met with (or held telephone conversations) with a range of key partners, potential partners and stakeholder organisations, including:

- Arts Council England
- Northumberland County Council (Leisure and Cultural Services, Youth Services)
- Blyth Valley Arts and Leisure
- Queen’s Hall Hexham

- Phoenix Theatre Blyth
- Newbiggin Arts Forum
- Blyth Resource and Initiative Centre
- Bedlington Day Centre
- Wansbeck CVS
- Northumberland College
- Northumbria University
- Arcadea
- Northumberland Community Development Network

ArtReach has also conducted a survey of teaching staff and educationalists (encompassing the special education sector) and of individual community representatives.

The discussions and survey activities have explored perceptions of Headway Arts, partnership and collaboration opportunities, and resource/facility requirements. Informing the Headway Arts analysis of facility requirements there is a clear sense that:

- Headway Arts needs to more effectively project and promote its image, vision and mission, activities and services
- Headway Arts must operate across Northumberland (and potentially beyond) delivering activity on an outreach basis as well as in a home base
- Headway Arts needs to explore and secure more partnership working and especially to work closely with the Queen's Hall, Hexham and other Northumberland venues as part of a new arts development and delivery approach across the county
- There are new opportunities for Headway Arts to work with communities in Wansbeck (and potentially to utilise any new arts or events venue developed in Ashington)
- Any facilities developed in Blyth need to link in effectively with the work being undertaken by other local arts groups and to complement initiatives such as Seaton Delaval Arts Centre
- The Phoenix Theatre, Blyth has underused capacity and excellent performing arts resources that could be maximized and where partnership with Headway Arts presents opportunities
- South East Northumberland is significantly under resourced in terms of both suitable facilities that can deliver artistic presentation (performance and exhibition) and that provide opportunities for participation
- Opportunities for placement and internship with Headway Arts are highly valued and provide a high quality learning and professional development experience that could be further exploited (if facilities and resources allowed) to the benefit of placement recipients, Headway Arts and its user/participant groups

In addition a specific consultation session was held with local community representatives. This was valuable both in terms of hearing views on facility needs of the community but also to hear ideas as to how these might be realized.

Wider survey activity

ArtReach has conducted an online and telephone survey to gauge the views of:

1. Teachers and educationalists (from primary, middle, secondary and special education)
2. Wider community representatives (individuals, some of whom represent or lead groups)

Response to date, perhaps not surprisingly, indicates that education personnel are more interested in seeing opportunities within school and therefore have less to say about facility needs for the sub region. The survey of individuals, however, strongly reinforces the absence of participatory arts facilities in south east Northumberland with 50% of those responding wanting to see creative arts facilities accessible to the whole community, with provision for artists studios and arts training facilities also highlighted as important needs. These aspirations were much more strongly articulated than an interest in a performance venue per se.

Comparator review

In addition to exploring the wish list of Headway Arts, the thoughts of partners, stakeholders and participants, and the views of local people, it is also helpful to look at other comparator UK organisations and projects. Comparators reviewed were:

Theatre Resource (Zinc) in Ongar, Essex, a professional arts organisation specialising in the area of disability arts and social inclusion and based in a converted former school building

First Movement a specialist company based in Rowsley, Derbyshire which has created its own new build facility. It has built a strong reputation for the quality of its projects with people with learning disabilities and for its ability to include people with the most significant disabilities and communication difficulties.

Strange Cargo based in Folkestone in Kent. Strange Cargo does not specialise in work with people with disability or leaning disability, although it does undertake many participatory projects that include opportunities for disabled people. It is developing a new production, training and participation base which provides an interesting model in the light of Headway Arts' aspirations.

Mind the Gap based in Bradford, West Yorkshire. The company has become one of the UK's leading disability-related theatre companies, creating theatre for national touring. Mind the Gap delivers professional theatre by disabled people and has created its own studio based venue.

The comparators illustrate different, successful models and a clear focus on the need to develop specific facilities to meet identified needs of the target participant groups with a primary priority to provide making, rehearsal and workshop rather than presentation space (although the Mind the Gap facility does offer a high quality performance space as well as workshop). In all cases there is an outward looking approach with a commitment to enabling other communities and community groups to use the facilities provided and utilizing this carefully developed option as a means to generate earned income.

Analysis from ArtReach

The role of ArtReach is to assess the aspirations of the company in the light of feedback from partners, users and wider stakeholders and informed by comparators and its own experience of developing fit for purpose buildings for the arts. It also brings a pragmatic understanding of the realities of achieving the required outcome and an understanding of where compromise needs to be made in order to ensure the best possible chance of success.

It is clear that the current Headway Arts base is inadequate and that this undermines the potential of the work and has a negative impact on the projected image of the company and its aspirations.

There is no question that Headway Arts needs regular and secure access to an appropriate sized workshop/rehearsal space (a space suitable for a group the size of an average school class to undertake rigorous physical, performance workshop activity). The space should have a suitable floor and sufficient head height to be safe for dance activity. It needs to be fully accessible and to be secure in that others do not need access through the space whilst workshop activity is taking place. This black box space ideally needs to have the potential to be used as a small performance space for modest audiences (which means meeting fire and licensing regulations for public attendance). Ideally there will be a separate space that can be used for “dirty” making activity, with a wet area. However, some making could take place in the main space as and when required (especially for larger props/costumes/dressing for street arts and festival activity).

Headway Arts would benefit from having access to a more sophisticated performance space (e.g. with permanent stage lighting and sound) but this is not an essential ingredient of the company base and would not be used by Headway Arts on a continuous basis.

Alongside the key workshop/rehearsal space there need to be toilet facilities meeting a specification that goes beyond the DDA requirements of building regulations i.e. reflecting the needs of Headway Arts user groups. There also needs to be sufficient storage for props, costumes, stage dressing and materials and a safe storage area for cleaning materials/equipment and COSHH protected materials.

The base needs a discreet meeting room space that can accommodate up to fifteen people for planning sessions, consultation groups and training activity. This space offers versatility in meeting a number of requirements and could also be a small practice or rehearsal room where a group using the main space needs to break out. The base requires an open plan office space for at least four personnel and a separate office for the CEO and Projects Manager. The offices need to be served by a small kitchen with hot drink making and microwave oven facilities. There needs to be capacity within the office space for expansion, whether that is temporary to accommodate the needs of short term projects, or a permanent response to company growth.

The other key ingredient of the base is a suitable “rest area” where participants working with the company over a full day (and staff) can take a break, have a coffee or eat lunch. This might be fitted with vending machines and water cooler. It may also be a space where those collecting participants can wait. It might be an area with provision for community exhibitions.

Beyond these core requirements the Headway Arts base might include open public space. Such space would certainly encompass a larger exhibition area and might include café facilities. However, the inclusion of a cafe may bring operational risks that are inappropriate and also means competition with other local businesses.

There is no evidence of demand for café facilities and the concept of a large rest area with vending machines may be more appropriate both to serve the workshop space and any public exhibition area that is created.

There is currently insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the challenges involved in creating an Early Years Creativity Centre would be justified by need and demand and would be sustainable. This may be an aspiration to return to in the future, especially if a more ambitious, new build option becomes available. However, for the purposes of current options appraisal and identifying an immediate route forward this ingredient has not been included in essential requirements. An Early Years Centre development would certainly need significant partnership commitment and potentially a Feasibility Study in its own right.

3. Detailed facility requirements (sq metre space needs)

On the basis of the analysis given above the following table indicates the proposed optimum and minimum requirements for Headway HQ (at this moment in time). The optimum requirements are informed by the current and anticipated programme of activities and on realistic potential for development in the next few years.

Headway Arts base – optimum requirements

Space				Tech facilities	Wi-Fi	Sound proof	Floor	Blackout
	Size Sq metres	Height	People capacity					
Main Workshop/ rehearsal space	100	Double	40 for workshop 80 for informal performance	Projection screen Limited flexible stage lighting +sound	Y	Y	Flexible for dance but not fully sprung	Y
Making space	50	Double	15	Plenty of power	Y	Y	Paintable	N
Public/Exhibition/ refreshment area	50	1 ½	40	Projection and plenty of power	Y	Y	Paintable	Y
Meeting Room	25	Single	15	screen	Y	Y		Y
Open Plan office and research/reference	30	Single	6		Y	N		N
Other office accommodation	20	Single	3		Y	Y		N

Space					Tech facilities	Wi-Fi	Sound proof	Floor	Blackout
	Size Sq metres	Height	People capacity						
Seven Stars base space	30	Single	10			Y	N		
Toilets	40	Single	6		4 x disabled		Y		
Back of house shower/wash facilities	20	Single	4				N		
Kitchen associated with offices	15	Single	4				N		
Storage	25	Double	N/A				N	Paintable	
Materials store	15	Double	N/A				N	Paintable	
SUB TOTAL	420								
Add walls and circulation at 20%	84								
TOTAL	504								

The analysis suggests a building of circa 500 sq metres is required (floor space of approximately 420 square metres although the requirements for double height space means the actual spatial requirement is greater).

There are other optimum requirements, not appropriate to highlight in a table that will contribute to making Headway HQ a fit-for purpose base for the organisation:

- A central Blyth location, potentially on the quayside to maximise synergy with future redevelopment and regeneration (though location elsewhere could be explored in the light of suitability of an existing building with potential for conversion)
- A building design that incorporates the work of artists (including community artists)
- A commitment to innovative, eco-friendly design, construction and services provision
- Provision of appropriate disabled parking (and reasonably close parking and drop off facilities for participants and carers, and for loading/unloading)

- Access and circulation that allows open, community access whilst safeguarding vulnerable participants and users (e.g. by provision of appropriate exhibition/refreshment/rest space that is open to all) – this may require the location of a reception/administration front office that can ensure the space is monitored (and that personal contact can be provided to ensure visitors feel welcome)
- Access to a secure, outside making and participation space

There is a strong sense that the ambience of Headway HQ must inspire creativity and that where spaces are described as single height it is important this is not matched to modern residential standards. A sense of space, height and air will be important in all parts of the building. It is also important to highlight the need for suitable size doors into storage and making facilities (to accommodate large props and puppets etc).

The company also considered whether the creation of any supporting mobile facility (replicating the bus that was part of the company's facilities in the past) might be a desirable option, but concluded that this was no longer a requirement.

The assessment of minimum requirements is intended to help determine whether an option for change is worth pursuing i.e. will the company be significantly better off than by continuing in its current premises and with current space arrangements.

Headway Arts base – minimum requirements

Space				Tech facilities	Wi-Fi	Sound proof	Floor	Blackout
	Size Sq metres	Height	People capacity					
Main Workshop/ rehearsal space	75	Double	30 for workshop 60 for informal performance	Projection screen	Y	Y	Flexible for dance but not fully sprung	Y
Making space	30	Double	10	Plenty of power	Y	Y	Paintable	N
Public/Exhibition/ refreshment area	30	Single	15		Y	Y	Paintable	Y
Meeting Room	20	Single	10	screen	Y	Y		Y
Open Plan office and research/reference	20	Single	4		Y	N		N
Other office accommodation	15	Single	2		Y	Y		N

Space					Tech facilities	Wi-Fi	Sound proof	Floor	Blackout
	Size Sq metres	Height	People capacity						
Seven Stars base	25	Single	10			Y			
Toilets	30	Single	4		2 x disabled		Y		
Back of house shower/wash facilities									
Kitchen associated with offices	10	Single	3				N		
Storage	20	Single	N/A				N	Paintable	
Materials store	10	Single	N/A				N	Paintable	
SUB TOTAL	285								
Add walls and circulation at 20%	57								
TOTAL	342								

The minimum requirements are circa 340 sq metres (with 285 sq metres of useable floor space (though once again there is a double height requirement)).

4. Potential options to address need

There are three broad options for Headway Arts in order to meet its identified facilities need:

1. Development of a new build capital project
2. Acquisition of an existing building for conversion
3. Partnership with another organisation to share facilities

New build capital project

On the basis of an average cost of £3,500 per square metre the optimum Headway Arts base would require a budget, in today's terms of circa £1,750,000.

This would not include any purchase costs associated with a site (and any demolition/ground preparation costs involved). This figure is comparable with the project being developed by Strange Cargo in Folkestone.

Despite the obstacles Headway Arts is keen to see a landmark new build option kept on the table and to explore whether NCC or another partner can provide a site option which might present a platform for fundraising.

Acquisition of an existing building

The conversion of an existing building would clearly present a cheaper option to new build, although a substantial budget may still be required. One advantage of conversion is the opportunity to undertake work in stages as resources become available, and to use the platform of a secure base as a starting point for fundraising. However, the building must be fit for purpose for the functions the company currently needs to deliver.

A budget can't be placed on conversion without understanding the status and condition of a proposed building. However, comparator experience would suggest that anything from £250,000- £500,000 might be required in the longer term (based on £500-£1,000 per sq metre). Acquisition of a former public building may be an option for Headway Arts. Acquiring an existing building may present a compromise between developing the facilities needed as against being based in the optimum location.

Partnership with another organisation

The obvious potential candidate is Phoenix Theatre Blyth, but the operating company has not demonstrated any commitment to progressing partnership discussions.

5. Route forwards

In the light of the options highlighted above the route forward is proposed as follows:

1. Explore with key partners (primarily land owners in Blyth) any option for acquisition of land to provide a platform for a new build option/aspiration. If achieved this would provide a platform for fundraising bids and future development work. The key agencies to explore this option with are Northumberland County Council, Port of Blyth and Fergusons.

This is likely to be a long term option but is the most aspirational in terms of meeting Headway Arts needs and ambition.

2. Simultaneously explore the options available for building conversion. Given the commitment to Blyth, the company has a clear geographic limit on where it wants to be based. This provides the parameters for a full search of suitable property that is both currently available and may become available in the foreseeable future.

3. Continue to pursue potential partnership with the Phoenix or indeed other building based organizations, though this seems the least likely scenario given that Phoenix has not responded positively to overtures on this basis.

(Ends)

Further copies of this report can be downloaded from our website

HEADWAY ARTS

21 Quay Road

Blyth

Northumberland

NE24 2AS

U.K.

T: +44 (0) 1670 351962

E: headwayt@aol.com

www.headwayhq.co.uk