



Headway Arts

Facility Requirements Report

Prepared by

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CONSULTANTS Ltd

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NORTHUMBERLAND
COUNTY COUNCIL

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 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. Identified facilities need

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 a document attached as Appendix A (*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.

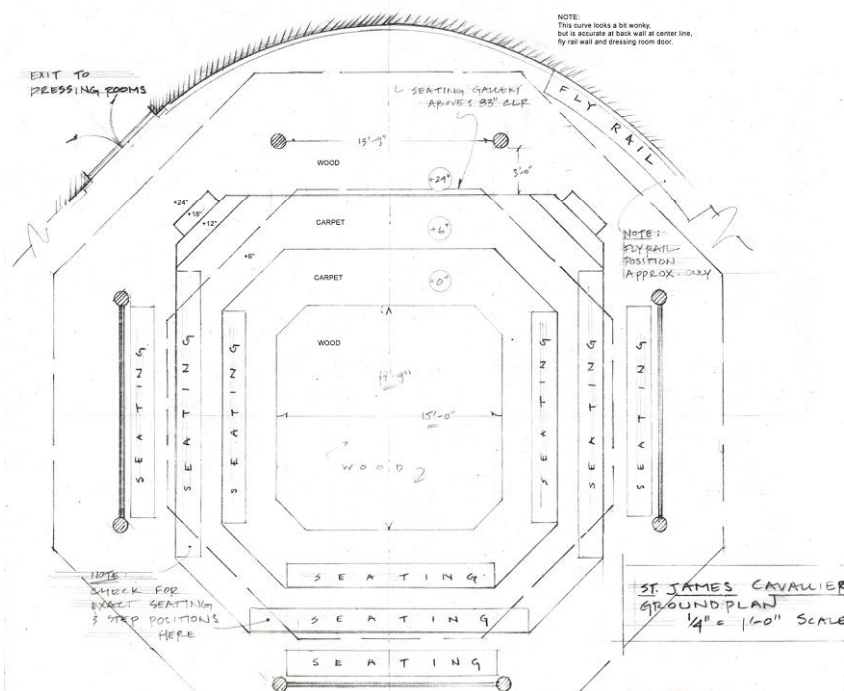
*The work of Headway Arts has grown steadily over the past 15 years and it continues to develop, constantly reinventing it’s ideas to accommodate the needs of the local communities, but always retaining it’s values and principles. It’s key aims over the next five years are to build on its work and ensure 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.

The Headway Arts team highlighted the space at The Cavalier Centre in Malta (illustrated below), where they had worked on a collaborative EU project, as one which inspired and provided the widest range of facilities they might aspire to.



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.

Community focus group

Key thoughts and comments are summarised below:

Blyth Valley Sports Centre is now perceived as a leisure and events facility. It has hosted Doorstep touring cinema as part of the Blyth Valley Arts provision. By contrast the group did not feel that the Phoenix Theatre was seen as having a community arts role.

In terms of spaces and local need, there is need for an accessible performance space. Before the Isabella Centre was built there were no suitable community spaces. Other opportunities with existing spaces were the Wallaw Cinema which, as it is art deco and listed, presents issues around redevelopment. There are also church halls - St Cuthbert's and United Reformed Church Hall (recently available). There are also small factory units on the industrial estates that could provide space, but any space Headway Arts uses would need to be on a bus route as location and travelling would be crucial.

Locations in central Blyth are more expensive. There is the open quays area that has development opportunities. It has planning permission from NCC for mixed use and is currently privately owned. With the Port of Blyth there are plans for the port to move to North Blyth, where there is deep water, with plans for mixed use/residential development for the old port location. The group felt that the quayside base would be a good location for quayside festivals.

In terms of the role for Headway Arts if there was a venue, the group felt it would need to be able to generate earned income e.g. café and business use with access to passing trade.

They felt it might be viable in a quayside location. There could be a call for a local new building which is fit for purpose. The Buffalo Centre does not lend itself to community use and is maintenance heavy. The Library is also not ideal.

There may be an opportunity for a multi-use heritage, museum centre. Blyth has a great deal of history and there could be a role for a facility such as the Chantry Museum, Morpeth which also involves local heritage organisations and has a focus for local crafts and opportunities for local crafts people through a shop.

There is also a need for a community gallery space for temporary exhibitions of photos and paintings from talented local people. This does not have to be a dedicated “white” hanging space but rather for first time exhibition and emerging artists there could be incidental hanging spaces within any new building/facility e.g. use of staircases etc.

The other space currently available is the bandstand on the beach which, with redevelopment could potentially be part of a walk to the harbour. The whole quayside area has potential. The group was convinced that the area will be redeveloped eventually when the economic situation improves.

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.

Views of users and participants

Workshop consultation sessions were held with Seven Stars, Random Youth Theatre and with Bedlington Day Centre Dance Group.

Seven Stars

The Seven Stars group shared its ambitions. In terms of a building they need more space. In the Headway Arts space they can only do a read through and have to go to the Church Hall to move and block the scenes. If they get too squashed, things can “kick off” so the Church Hall works better. In effect there is a fundamental problem with the current space not being fit for purpose. Space is particularly important when they are devising shows (where improvisation and movement is needed from the start).

The group enjoys and identifies that they benefit from touring and from exchange visits e.g. previous trips to Malta and Belgium. This activity is partly about developing independence which is very important to members. Their ultimate aim is to become independent so that the Headway Arts workers would not necessarily need to be there.

An aspiration is to develop that independence by having a discreet Seven Stars office and administration base within Headway Arts. This is a strong aspiration and one that needs to inform facilities requirements. The need is for independent space within the Headway HQ that can serve as an office, but much more can be an independent space for participants to informally meet together, chill –out (including when there is tension within the workshop or rehearsal activity) and relax/have a break etc.

The group is also keen to explore involvement in other areas of theatre making – having access to technical facilities – accessible lighting, film making and sound recording. This might be particularly important if, as hoped, the size of the group increases from the established 10 to 20 participants. As the Seven Stars group is used to “making do” with what it has it is particularly important to continue the process of consultation during any base development so that members can see opportunities as they arise and will be ambitious in their wish list.

Random Youth Theatre

The group is clear that it would like a good space to work in. The current room is suitable for about six people but would not be big enough if the group is to grow. They particularly value being in an environment that is not school, or like a school, as people have negative perceptions attached to the school environment.

Members would like to do more complicated shows every now and then. More like the scale Phoenix do i.e. they are interested in hands on with more sophisticated theatre equipment/facilities.

The Random group doesn't just do drama. There is also artwork to make when the space changes with tables set up and a mat on the floor to convert it to an art space. There is need for making space as well as rehearsal/performance.

In terms of other art forms, members would like to make a movie of a play they've done, to tape it and show it to schools. They are interested in acting for film but also really interested in tackling issues like bullying, drink-driving, knife crime and anti-social behaviour and think it's important to get the message across. Film would be a good way of doing this. Making film brings further equipment, resource and facility needs

Current members live locally but come to the sessions by car with a journey time of between 10 – 15 minutes. Access for parking, drop off etc is therefore important. With respect to requirements for a new or improved space they said they might like a shop.

Bedlington Day Centre Dance Group

The Day Centre has a policy of going out and using other space/facilities. It's important to vary locations. If users stay in one venue this leads to institutionalization and institutional behaviour. Different environments encourage different behaviour which is positive. Plus, the use of other venues has potential for users to cross-over to other activities in community/other spaces (with particular potential if a Headway Arts base was a venue buzzing with different activities). However, the budget for transport is very large because of this and the Centre would not want to pay for use of the venue as well.

In terms of spaces for activities, it's vital to be able to book and own a space and to make sure those bookings are secure i.e. no last minute cancellations or rearrangements. So, this predictability would be vital as part of using any Headway Arts base.

For the dance group the Centre had sought to find a suitable, wheelchair accessible venue and looked at Phoenix Theatre, Blyth but was offered a small room which was not suitable. The Centre team thinks it's important to immerse the group in that specific theatre environment if possible.

In terms of Headway Art's aspirations for developing space, the Bedlington team feels this can become difficult to manage and result in a loss of creativity. However they do recognise the importance of having a space which you have control over.

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. Some of these comparators have also been included as part of comparator/competitor assessment in the Business Plan.

Theatre Resource (Zinc)

Zinc (formerly Theatre Resource) is based in Ongar, Essex and is a professional arts organisation (led by Director/CEO Jeff Banks) specialising in the area of disability arts and social inclusion. Its work promotes the creativity, culture and heritage of disabled people and socially excluded groups, for the benefit of all.

In 1998 Theatre Resource acquired a Victorian school building in Chipping Ongar which was for many years used as a boarding school for disabled and disadvantaged children from inner London.

The building was restored with the support of a number of partners and stakeholders and was re-opened in 1999 as a modern, well-equipped and fully-accessible arts education Centre.

The Centre is now used as the base for many of Zinc's own projects and programmes including a range of regional and national training, and continuing professional development opportunities for groups, individuals and organisations wishing to develop arts practice with disabled people and socially-excluded groups. The Centre has also become a much used resource for a wide range of local community groups and organisations.

The Centre has a large, bright central hall, two multi-purpose teaching spaces, pottery studio, ICT room/UK Online Centre, fine art studio, kitchen, offices, and large car-park and grounds. All the spaces are wheelchair-accessible.

Zinc wishes to expand the scope and range of its services and establish a world class centre of excellence for the development of arts education activities with and for disabled people and socially-excluded groups. The ambition is to develop a new fully-accessible residential study centre, in order to run a year round programme of residential courses and projects. It also wishes to establish a supported housing scheme on site providing accommodation for disabled people who will take part in longer term vocational training, employment and supported employment schemes.



Artist's impression of the Main Entrance



Entrance Hall and Exhibition Area

The new centre will extend and develop the old school site with facilities including:

- A studio theatre for the presentation of work produced at the centre and by visiting artists and companies
- A fully-accessible training kitchen for disabled people with dining area
- Overnight accommodation facilities with twenty-five fully accessible rooms
- A supported housing unit containing nine flats for residential students with disabilities
- Creative and technical workshop spaces for artistic, educational and community use
- Extended administrative space for staff
- A healthy information, advice and guidance resource and exhibition space
- A gallery and shop, displaying and selling work by centre users
- A landscaped site with relaxation courtyard, mezzanine walkways and sensory garden

Planning permission is in place, as are financial commitments of £4.4 million (from Essex County Council, East of England Development Agency, The Rayne Foundation and The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust). Work has started on the development and the new building is anticipated to open in 2011.

This is clearly an extremely ambitious (and expensive) project and illustrates the long term approach that is often needed for capital project development.

First Movement

First Movement is a specialist company based in Rowsley, Derbyshire, led by Director Peter Shelton. 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.

Its multi award winning building, The Level Centre, opened in September 2008. It offers state of the art new facilities for First Movement and studio space and meeting rooms for creative industry organisations.



A versatile Arts Event Space houses a wide range of events, from large-scale visual work, through performance workshops to larger training projects. The Level Studio is purpose designed as a space for working with media and live video link projects – creating collaborations with other participants across the East Midlands. A Technology Studio is equipped with sound and video editing systems to give people the opportunity to create exciting new work.

In addition First Movement has created the Level Mobile Studio bringing many of the resources of the Level Centre to people across the East Midlands. The Level Mobile Studio is a fully accessible, well equipped arts studio on wheels that contains all of the key facilities of the Level project, with the ability to work with digital imagery, video, sound, and animation. It also takes the Level project itself on the road, creating an ideal mobile environment for video conferencing, projection and sound.

The overall project had a cost in excess of £3.5 million.

Strange Cargo

Unlike Zinc and First Movement, Strange Cargo (based in Folkestone in Kent) 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.

ArtReach has been working with the company to develop a new production, training and participation base which provides an interesting model in the light of Headway Arts' aspirations.

The new base is in the early stages of design and will be built on a site which the company already owns. Using the specialist architect Tim Ronalds, an initial design for a landmark building has been created that provides fit for purpose space within a value engineered building to provide excellent value for money (initial cost estimate £1.8 million).

The building will comprise:

- A large double-height creation space
- Two smaller studios (one for clean and one for dirty making/workshop activity)
- Tools and materials stores
- Chill out area
- Toilet, shower and kitchen facilities

The new building will be accessible throughout, environmentally friendly and its materials robust and elegant – solid, yet glamorous. The position of the site offers the chance for Strange Cargo to become a real landmark building for Folkestone on the line between London and the coast.



Strange Cargo current workshop provision

Mind the Gap

Mind the Gap is based in Bradford, West Yorkshire and started 21 years ago. It 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.

All Space is the central hub of Mind the Gap Studios, connecting all three Studios in the building and the meeting room, in addition to the kitchen and changing areas. All Space acts as the café, foyer for productions or conferences, and is available in its own right as a party or celebration venue.

Studio 1 is the largest studio space, and can be used for performances, rehearsing, workshops, meetings and conferences. This space benefits from a semi-sprung floor and stereo PA system. Presentations can be shown on a 5m x 5m mounted projection screen and all building users have free access to the Wi-Fi network. Serge curtains and blackout blinds mean that the space can be transformed into a black box with various lighting effects. Available with a full lighting grid and a tiered seating bank, Studio 1 makes an excellent performance or showcase venue.

The detail of the spaces available at Mind the Gap are summarised below:

Summary of spaces – Mind the Gap Studios

	Capacity				Screen	CD / DVD / MP3 playback	Sound proof	Sprung floor	Blacout	Sound
	Board room / U-Shape	Theatre	Workshop	Cabaret						
Studio 1		100	50	60	5m x 5m projection	Y	Y	semi	Y	Stereo PA x 4
Studio 2	15	35	25	25	42" LCD	Y	N	N	N	Stereo PA x 2
Studio 3	20	40	40	30	projection	Y	N	Y	N	Stereo PA
Meeting Room	12	20	NA	NA	42" LCD	Y	N	N	N	Stereo PA
Allspice	NA	NA	NA	NA	60" LCD	Y	N	N	N	Stereo PA

	Size	Serge curtains	'Wet' work	Natural light	Climate control
Studio 1	17.6m x 8.55m	Y	N	Y	Under floor & air heating and cooling system
Studio 2	8.14m x 7.36m	Y	Y	Y	Under floor & windows
Studio 3	8m x 10m	N	N	Y	Under floor & air heating and cooling system and windows
Meeting Room	7.1m x 3.2m	N	N	N	Air conditioning

Other specialist companies - Movers, Anal Dance

Movers is a theatre company of learning disabled actors based in Leicester and Anjali Dance an award-winning, professional learning disabled dance group. Both operate on the basis of residency arrangements within high quality theatre/arts centre environments. Movers is based within Embrace Arts (formerly the Richard Attenborough Centre) part of Leicester University, which encompasses a flexible professional performance space, arts studios, gallery, meeting and rehearsal space and café facility. Anjali Dance is accommodated within the Mill at Banbury, a small scale arts centre with performance, gallery and café facilities. In both cases the companies benefit from the opportunity to use performance facilities without the burden of needing to manage or operate these facilities.

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 needs 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. Fundamental to the aspirations is creation of a discreet Seven Stars base within the Headway HQ. This is important for the ongoing development and autonomy of the Stars participants. 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 requirements

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

Space					Tech facilities	Wi-Fi	Sound proof	Floor	Blackout
	Size Sq metres	Height	People capacity						
Other office accommodation	20	Single	3			Y	Y		N
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 for meeting 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

It is generally accepted that arts buildings are expensive to create, because of a requirement for high quality design and construction, and because technical and service requirements may be considerably greater than for an average commercial building.

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.

A new build clearly requires a suitable site and there are two pieces of brown field land, of appropriate dimensions, on Blyth Quayside in close proximity to Headway Arts' current base. The land is in the ownership of Northumberland County Council and was earmarked as part of the master plan redevelopment and regeneration of Blyth Quayside. This project has stalled for the foreseeable future but at some time will almost certainly be revisited. When it is there may be considerable scope for joint working and a partnership approach to development (including delivery of shared facilities).

The site of the former Nautical School in Blyth remains undeveloped and in the ownership of the Wellesley Trust, who is keen to sell to release monies in order to fulfil their charitable objectives. To date sale of the land has stalled along with residential redevelopment. Development of a Headway base on that site might, however, support the aspirations of the Wellesley Trust and this presents an opportunity to be explored.

Discussions with the Port of Blyth indicate that it no longer has a significant land holding in the area having sold surplus property to One North East and NCC. Its main land holdings remain the working port terminals where access and building use is restricted to port related activities.

There may be other potential sites in Blyth Valley but none have been identified as optimum sites for a new creative arts venue and the Quayside location, in close proximity to Blyth town centre, remains an attractive option.

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 commitment to a site 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). The comparators that have been used as illustration highlights the model of Theatre Resource (Zinc) where a former school property has provided considerable flexibility for a staged development programme. 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.

There is an unused building close to the current Headway Arts base (former fish shop/store) but it is not of sufficient size to meet the minimum base requirements.

Exploration through the County Council needs to continue in order that any opportunity arising can be taken advantage of.

Fergusons of Blyth is owner of a number of buildings in Blyth Valley. It indicates it has a large industrial building in North Seaton that in size terms may be suitable but indicates a significant challenge in getting permission from planning for change of use. Fergusons highlighted potential buildings on the industrial estates of Blyth and Cramlington but the ambience of these locations and buildings is unlikely to be appropriate to a creative company.

Partnership with another organisation

Whilst there are one or two emerging/developing local arts organisations that have premises (e.g. Seaton Delaval Arts Centre and North East Music Factory) none appears to offer the opportunity for partnership that would provide the capacity requirements needed by Headway Arts.

The exception to this is clearly The Phoenix Theatre, Blyth. The Phoenix has a main workshop/rehearsal space that meets the optimum size requirement and a smaller practice/meeting room. It also has a bar/foyer area with exhibition space and of course a fully functioning professional theatre. The Phoenix appears to be unused during the daytime and also has some evening capacity (though that may be more variable). Attractions of partnership with the Phoenix are the opportunity it brings to utilise a professional performance space and the opportunity to move into an existing, operating building that requires no redevelopment or refurbishment.

There is also an opportunity to use such partnership to enable both Headway Arts and the Phoenix to better link into wider arts development initiatives and collaboration that is being delivered in response to the changing face of local government support for the arts and new Arts Council England strategic aims.

However, there are other issues with respect to partnership with the Phoenix around the ability of the latter to provide open access and to embrace an entirely new method of operation. These issues have been highlighted following a thorough attempt to engage with the Phoenix in autumn 2010 as part of the Headway Arts development work. Despite initial enthusiasm the Phoenix was unable to respond in a way that would suggest partnership presents any real credibility.

5. Route forwards

In the light of the options and development work highlighted above the route forwards is proposed as follows:

1. Maintain an open and continuous dialogue with Northumberland County Council to ensure that any collaborative opportunity to redevelop land on Blyth Quayside can be a priority. The dialogue should also ensure that Headway Arts becomes immediately aware of any potentially suitable buildings becoming redundant to NCC use. The working relationship with NCC will further develop if Headway Arts is successful in securing Portfolio Funding and engages fully with Queen's Hall in maximizing a County wide role. Post 31 March there may therefore be an opportunity to more effectively engage in discussion with NCC about its long term aspirations for Blyth Quayside and the place for Headway Arts within those plans (informing whether any short or medium term opportunity for building conversion is worth considering).

2. Test out whether the Wellesley Trust may perceive any synergy between its aims and the work of Headway Arts, and therefore be open to a discussion about use of land on the former Nautical School site.

An initial/introductory letter has been sent to the Chair of the Wellesley Trust.

3. Continue to be open to exploring potential partnership opportunity with the Phoenix in the light of the funding decisions to be made by Northumberland County Council (before March 2011) and the Portfolio Funding decisions that will be made by ACE in late March 2011.

In the event that these discussions do not lead to any partnership, then the work undertaken will still have been valuable in informing funding applications that are made for any future building conversion or new build. They will form part of any description of options appraisal and demonstrate why this option is not viable.

It seems likely now that any partnership possibility emerging from discussions with the Phoenix will need to be cautiously developed and would not be strong enough to allow Headway Arts to fully deliver to its longer term vision. It would therefore still retain the ambition and the potential to develop its own Headway Arts HQ in the future, as and when times are propitious. Short term partnership with the Phoenix might enable the company to take a step forward in maximizing its potential and increasing its impact. This would then provide a platform from which to achieve future development aspirations.

4. Continue to explore other 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 ongoing search of suitable property.

The action planning to take forwards this work is highlighted in the Development and Business Plan 2011-15 and forms part of one of the strategic company aims for the next three years.

(Ends)

Further copies of this report can be downloaded from our website

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