



# **A VISION: FAREHAM'S NEW ENTERTAINMENT VENUE**

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**FAREHAM**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to set out the Council's 'Vision' for a new arts and entertainment facility in Fareham town centre to replace Ferneham Hall



# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



**In the early 1980's, Fareham Borough Council decided to build an entertainment venue in Fareham Town Centre. It was agreed that the new venue would benefit from being located next to Fareham Shopping Centre, the multi-storey Car Park and the Library, creating a busy 'entertainment hub' in the centre of town.**

The then new venue was designed to attract a range of music, comedy and theatre shows touring Britain at that time, as well as being available for hire for amateur theatrical productions, exhibitions, conferences, meetings, dinner dances, parties and weddings.



In April 1982 Ferneham Hall was officially opened by the Duchess of Kent.

The Hall boasted a 700-seater auditorium, with retractable tiered seating to allow maximum flexibility, and two additional function rooms (The Meon and The Octagon). The new venue also included a bar area, a box office and large entrance foyer, as well as cloakrooms, toilets and all the normal backstage facilities.

In its early years, it was a popular venue, attracting well known entertainers such as Ken Dodd and Cilla Black. It has always been popular with local amateur theatre companies and still attracts large audiences for the popular annual pantomime. However, the aim of also attracting the wedding, conference and exhibition market has been less successful over the years.

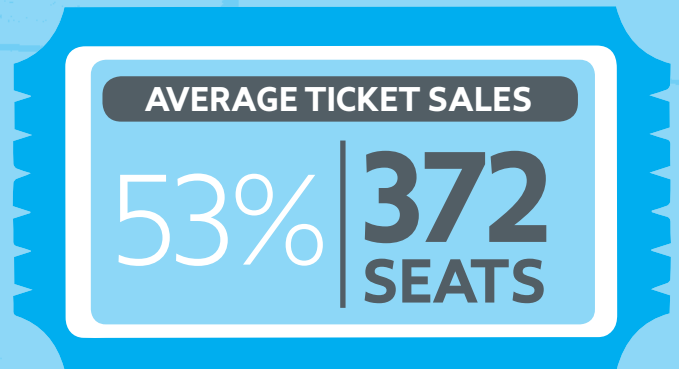
# FERNEHAM H

After nearly 40 years of service to the local community, the fabric of Ferneham Hall is looking tired, dated and in need of modernisation. The Council has maintained the building to a good standard, with investment in the roof and boilers during the last 5 years.

It is clear, however, that the layout and design of the building is no longer fit for purpose. Customer expectations have changed significantly since 1982, and they are attracted to large, air-conditioned buildings, with lots of space and natural light, offering comfortable seats with unrestricted views in the auditoria. There is also the expectation of a café culture where people can relax, meet, eat and drink in an attractive location at any time of the day.

A great deal has been learnt about venue “accessibility” over the last 40 years and Ferneham Hall struggles to meet current customer expectations. For example, there are no lifts to the upper floors, the auditoria are not designed to accommodate wheelchairs easily, and access to the stage is limited because of the need for steps.

It has become clear over the years that the main stage is neither wide enough or deep enough, which prevents many touring shows from performing at Ferneham Hall. Ferneham Hall’s capacity of 708 seats is not high enough to attract the quality of performers that many people want to see, with shows only reaching



an average of 53% capacity, or 372 seats.

Theatres with around 800 seats can generally attract higher profile and better-quality shows, generating more income through tickets sales and ‘on the night’ spending such as on food and drink.

**THE OCTAGON ROOM** is hired for events and meetings but is not suitable to hold smaller shows aimed at an audience of around 100 people. There is a market for such shows, including live film screenings of national ballet, opera, and National Theatre live productions, but the Octagon is unable to accommodate them comfortably.

# HALL TODAY



THE MEON ROOM only really acts as additional foyer space. Its location is not ideal, it has no windows or natural light, and has not proved to be a popular meeting space for hirers.

The entrance foyer is quite dark, dated and unwelcoming, and the box office/reception area is hidden away behind a small old-fashioned glass screen. Today's customers expect a sense of arrival when they walk into a venue, with easy access to reception staff, and large bright areas to circulate. The bar area in Ferneham Hall can get crowded very quickly, and circulation space is limited because of the location of the Meon Room.

Of concern, is the low level of customer activity during daytime hours. Most shows and events take place in the evening and, as a result, Ferneham Hall is rarely used during the day. As such, the space within the building is significantly underutilised.

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**The Council has ambitions to build a community centre in Fareham Town Centre, and the remodelling of Ferneham Hall offers a real opportunity to combine a new arts and entertainment venue with a busy community facility.**

# SHOWS & EVENTS

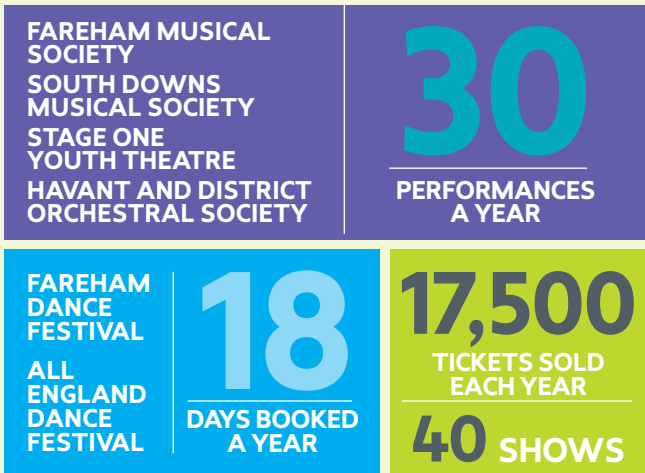


**Ferneham Hall continues to be a popular venue to hire for local amateur theatrical productions. Local groups such as the Fareham Musical Society, South Downs Musical Society, Stage One Youth Theatre and Havant and District Orchestral Society have made regular bookings over the last three years resulting in approximately 30 performances a year. In addition, the main auditorium is regularly booked for 18 days a year by the Fareham Dance Festival and All England Dance Festival. A new arts and entertainment facility would need to accommodate these groups and attract more.**



The annual pantomime is a popular feature at Ferneham Hall and numbers have remained consistent over the last three years, which included performances of Dick Whittington, Sleeping Beauty and Aladdin. Average audience numbers were around **430** per performance, with approximately **17,500** tickets sold each year over the duration of **40** shows.

Customer reaction to touring shows and productions is mixed. It is difficult to attract well known acts as they tend to target their shows at much larger venues in the neighbouring cities. Some of the better touring productions would like to visit Fareham, but consider the size of the stage at Ferneham Hall to be a barrier, and the backstage area of the main auditoria is inadequate. The shows that are booked by Ferneham Hall management vary in popularity and there is always a risk to be recognised when calculating potential ticket sales. The current programme reflects more traditional theatre style entertainment, tribute bands, comedians and old school classics, such as 1980's artists, that generally has a narrow audience appeal. As such, income and attendance has remained static and therefore it is considered a more dynamic and innovative approach to programming is required in the future to reinvigorate the venue.



Hire of the main auditorium as a hall (without seating) is less popular. Over the last year the tiered seating has only been retracted for **16** events, **3** of which were for civic occasions such as the Election Count, Mayor Making and the Fareham In Bloom Awards. This raises the question as to whether a new venue should opt for the flexibility of retractable seating or the improved comfort of (and less labour intensive) permanent seating.



# COSTS

It is important to note that, whilst the Council is wholly committed to providing a modern arts and entertainment venue in Fareham Town Centre, there is a need to reduce the annual operating cost of such a facility.

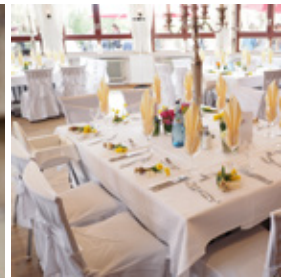
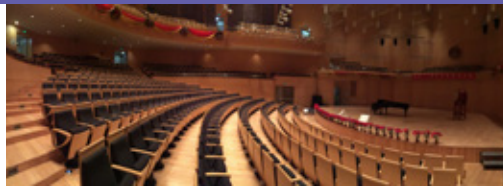
The Council's revenue budgets are under considerable pressure following major reductions in Government funding over recent years and there is a need for all Council services to be cost effective in the future. The annual operating costs of Ferneham Hall were **£396,200** for **2015/16**, **£423,400** for **2016/17** and **£418,200** for **2017/18**.



The deficit needs to be reduced significantly in the future and a key part of this vision is the need to plan a new facility which could be more commercial in its outlook and reduce the level of annual subsidy provided by the Council. It is believed that this could be achieved through a combination of increased income and by reducing costs.



# A VISION FOR THE FUTURE







We want to provide a busy community arts and entertainment centre which includes daytime and evening activity, seven days a week. We believe that this can be achieved through the provision of smaller, flexible, meeting spaces, improved catering areas and possibly a flexible studio space and secondary, smaller performance space.

The stage and seating in the main auditorium need to be the right size and design to attract a good range of touring productions as well as being available for hire to local amateur groups. We would like to see a more dynamic and innovative approach to programming to attract a wider range of customers to the venue. The annual pantomime is popular and we would like to see this retained and developed as part of the overall programme.

We want the interior and exterior of the building to be attractive, modern and welcoming, and complementary to the other new buildings within the Civic Quarter.

The new venue will be more commercial in its outlook and we expect the annual operating costs to be low, with the ultimate aim of breaking even.



# DESIGN PRIORITIES



These are the main design priorities that need to be considered for a future arts and entertainment facility

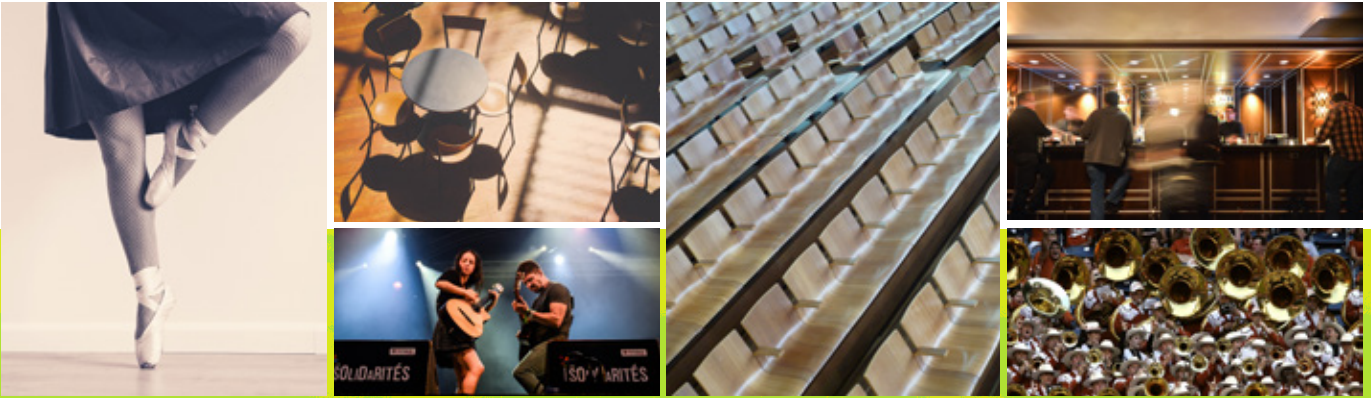
Improvements to the exterior appearance of the building, including a welcoming entrance

Alterations to the foyer and box office area to provide a sense of arrival

Improved audience facilities, such as toilets and catering areas, in terms of comfort, appearance and overall experience

Demolition of the Octagon lounge

Improved access within the venue, including a lift



In the interest of fuel efficiency, individual parts of the building to be lit, heated and/or ventilated independently

Improved cast/crew areas, including the stage and backstage, to support high quality performances

The addition of community rooms for hire and/or to hold workshops, to enable the venue to operate as a busy community centre

Improved office space

Improve the comfort of the main auditorium and increase the size to around 800 seats to attract better quality shows

A smaller, more intimate flexible secondary performance space (100 seats) including screen and projector room

Options for retractable seating versus permanent seating

A flexible studio space



# FIND OUT MORE

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Find out more about our vision at  
[www.fareham.gov.uk](http://www.fareham.gov.uk)