

## **Herford Theatre Video - transcript**

**TAMARA JARVIS** - I'm Tamara Jarvis, the Council's Major Projects Manager and I am here to introduce the Hertford Theatre Growth and Legacy project.

Two years ago, East Herts District Council approved funding for the redevelopment of Hertford Theatre to respond to the needs of our customers and residents by providing enhanced theatre and community facilities as well as additional cinema screens.

This theatre has become a cultural and social hub for Hertford, and this project will build on that position, ensuring it remains exciting and relevant for its growing audience who love theatre, film and live performance. The Theatre also plays an important role in bringing people from out-of-town to Hertford, to the benefit of the town centre and the local economy.

This bold and ambitious project with sustainability at its heart will see a £19.9 million investment to transform the Theatre. Amongst other improvements, plans for the redevelopment include three new cinema screens, more seating in the main auditorium, a new 150 seat studio, and a riverside café bar for theatre and Castle Park visitors.

This project not only shows the Council's commitment to providing high quality, sustainable facilities for the community, but also to truly investing in local residents and local places.

This is a building that will serve our residents now and for future generations, and we are excited to bring you along on this journey to learn more about it.

**RHYS THOMAS** - Hi. My name's Rhys Thomas and I'm the Director at Hertford Theatre; and I'm here to introduce the Growth and Legacy Scheme for the theatre.

Over the last ten years, myself and my team have been working to create a building where people can come to feel happier, healthier, safer, and proud.

And we do this by presenting the very best in drama, dance, music, comedy live events, films and community activities that we possibly can

And last year, 100,000 people bought tickets to see events and film at the theatre And they were joined by thousands more participating in classes and workshops, or just popping in for a coffee and a cake.

Ten years ago, six schools came to see our first Christmas show.

But last year in 2019, 51 separate schools from the private, state and SEN sectors brought 7,000 children to see The Snow Queen.

Similarly, ten years ago we had no volunteer scheme. But over the last decade we've enjoyed the support of hundreds of volunteers who've helped us to deliver all of the events that take place at Hertford Theatre.

Community organisations such as NHS Blood Donor Service, The University of the Third Age, the National Trust, thirty separate dance and drama schools, Hertford Dramatic and Operatic Society, Ware Operatic Society, Hertford Symphony Orchestra among many, many

others have all helped breathe life into this building and develop the cultural heartbeat of Hertford.

And alongside all that community activity, we've welcomed a myriad of household names to our stage at Hertford Theatre. The likes of Michael McIntyre, Martin Freeman, Simon Pegg, Juliet Stevenson, Romesh Ranganathan, Steeleye Span, Georgie Fame, Ronnie Scott's All Stars - the list goes on and on - alongside a first class programme of films and live broadcasts from the likes of The National Theatre, The Royal Shakespeare Company, Royal Opera House, and Glyndebourne. All combining to create a programme of the very highest quality.

The Growth and Legacy Scheme builds on that success, enables more people, more of the time to engage with life-long enjoyment of Arts and Culture but particularly young people, with the introduction of first-release film - to screen films at the same time they are released in the bigger multiplexes.

The new scheme facilitates the opportunity to be nil-deficit to the Council, brings to Hertford a remarkable new Arts Building that celebrates its location as well as boosting the economic and cultural life of this special town and district for decades to come.

So I'm sure in ten years time, you'll be sitting in this new building watching an amazing show or an Oscar-winning film and still celebrating a building that was designed and built for all of our community to feel happier, healthier, safer, and proud.

So on that note, I'll hand over to Alastair Bogle from Bennetts Associates to talk you through the design proposals. Thank you.

**ALASTAIR BOGLE** - Hello, my name is Alastair Bogle and I represent Bennetts Associates Architects. We're a practice with over 30 years experience working in the commercial and cultural sectors. And together with East Herts District Council, we're redeveloping Hertford Theatre.

What we want to do is create a cultural hub for Hertford, building on the success that has already been cultivated, creating growth and legacy and a building that works for the council and also serves the local community.

To achieve this, we need to address some of the fundamental issues related to the existing building. Currently, the building doesn't address the town, river or castle gardens grounds in a meaningful manner. Internally, both capacity and accessibility issues has capped the potential of development in its current state.

At the core of this redevelopment is unlocking the potential of this historic and important site.

Understanding that the building will be a contemporary one, setting within historic context, and having the ability to unlock the wider story of Hertford, promoting access and engagement with both the history and landscape of the area.

Sustainability needs to be at the heart of this redevelopment, and that's something that at Bennetts Associates we take very seriously.

In addition to setting the target of BREEAM Excellent for this development, there are a number of approaches that we've applied in the decision-making process so far.

This involves building less (retaining elements of the building where possible). Building low carbon - specifying materials with a low embodied energy. Building efficiently using sufficient servicing to drive down operational energy use. And building beautiful (hopefully!), so the building is loved and therefore has longevity.

This has led us to a design response through an iterative and collaborative process that responds to the core issues of both the brief and site to hopefully create a contemporary contextual building that Hertford can be proud of.

After investigation, it was deemed that the front of house spaces were not viable enough for the new development, and therefore would have to be removed, leaving the existing fly tower and auditorium in place which can be internally remodelled.

The retained portion of the building is then wrapped with a series of volumes.

Each volume has a scale and character reflective of its context, and have been crafted to respond to key views around the site; pulling back from the river edge to open up new routes and form a contiguous set of volumes that form a pleasing ensemble.

Each of these volumes houses a specific item from the brief and are perceived as solid blocks which can be carved to create openings be these at windows, entrances, or areas of interest related to a piece of immediate context.

It's important that these volumes can be understood internally as well as externally, being read as a series of buildings coming together to make one whole.

Choosing the most appropriate material for this building is very important. We're looking for something that has a contemporary quality to it, but also suits the context of Hertford town itself.

Brick feels like the right material choice for this project, as it's something that strengthens the idea of a set of monolithic blocks that have been carved, but can also be detailed in a way that is playful and humane.

For Hertford, we decided to use the datum of the window openings and the manipulation of the brick course using a glazed brick and a protruding header course, to create an interesting pattern over the facade that will create a lot of difference depending on the way the light hits it, be it natural or artificial throughout the day.

This same rule is applied to each individual volume, but because the window heights are different, it creates a natural difference between each volume itself, thus creating a little bit more difference between each volume.

This can be seen on this conceptual render of the entrance, where depending on the angle that the block is viewed, the facade looks different because of the protruding brick pattern, and continues to change and evolve from day into night.

Internally on the ground floor, the building is arranged around a series of contiguous public spaces, and a bar and cafe area with views across the River Lea.

These uses are continued onto the upper floor with internal spaces also arranged around an atrium in the centre of the building. The cinemas are also all located on this first floor level and managed from a single entry point.

In the new auditorium, the key move is to increase the capacity to overall 550 seats. To do this, we've removed the existing bleacher seating and soffit within the space to increase the overall volume, allowing us to insert a new stalls and balcony level.

In addition to improving the technical facilities in the space and upgrading the back of house to make them accessible, we want to improve the overall user experience for both members of the public and performers, making it feel a lot more like a theatre and something really special.

The studio theatre will operate as a smaller version of the auditorium, delivering both a theatrical and cinematic programme albeit on a smaller scale with 150 seats spread over two floors.

Equally as important as how the building operates internally, is how it forms externally. The landscape design has been crafted to respond to both the town and River Lea context to provide a high quality setting for the new theatre. This includes the remodelling of some existing green spaces on site and also improvements to the banks of the River Lea to promote views and access along this space; and includes a new low impact walkway that allows direct engagement with the moat and access to Castle Gardens grounds.

Overall, we hope this creates a new high quality building for Hertford, securing growth and legacy in the future of the theatre, allowing visitors to enjoy a new section of the river with the theatre being at focal point.

**TAMARA JARVIS** - This is your opportunity as local residents to provide your feedback on this exciting investment. Please do take the time to review the proposals on the Council's website and submit a survey with your feedback.