

# YOUR CHANCE TO REOPEN THE OCTAGON THEATRE



Yeovil Town Council

 **OCTAGON**  
THEATRE

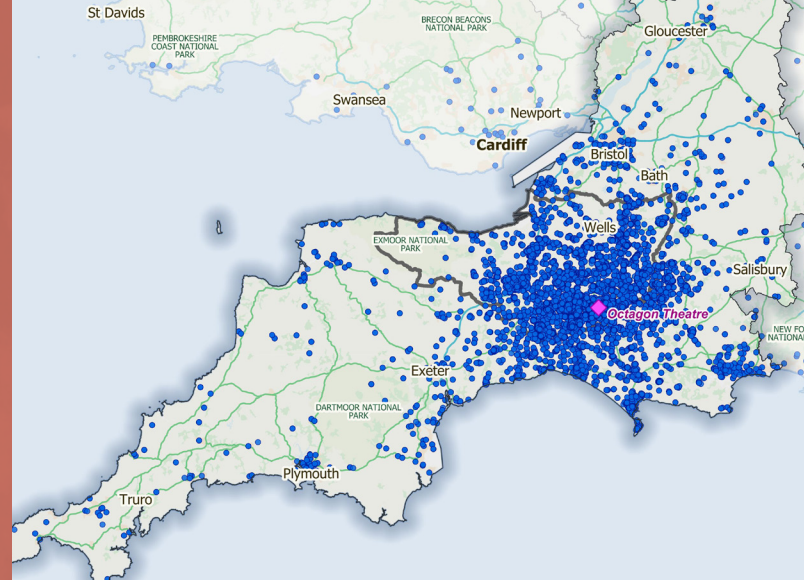
[www.octagon-theatre.co.uk](http://www.octagon-theatre.co.uk)

# THE NEED FOR INVESTMENT

We are delighted to share with you redevelopment plans for the Octagon Theatre that will see the current building reopened and transformed into a flagship venue for the arts and entertainment. The Octagon Theatre closed at the end of April 2023 for survey works to take place ahead of a planned development of the theatre. Sadly, and just weeks away from construction work due to begin, the project was deemed “unviable” due to inflation impacting borrowing and the construction industry by Somerset Council who had also declared a “financial emergency”.

Yeovil Town Council arranged a public meeting on the future of the theatre with members voting to support the development of the Octagon Theatre.

Working in partnership with Somerset Council, Yeovil Town Council voted to offer, in principle, capital funding to the development of the Octagon Theatre to secure the venue's future for the town and to seek to keep the £10m of government funding for the development. Over the last year a number of milestones in the development of the venue have taken place and we are pleased to share with you our plans for this exciting development. The plans will secure the future of the Octagon Theatre for generations to come.



*Each dot on the map represents a customer who purchased a ticket for our venues (Octagon Theatre & Westlands Entertainment Venue) between 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024. It does not capture how many tickets they purchased (or information for accompanying guests) or how many times they purchased tickets that year.*

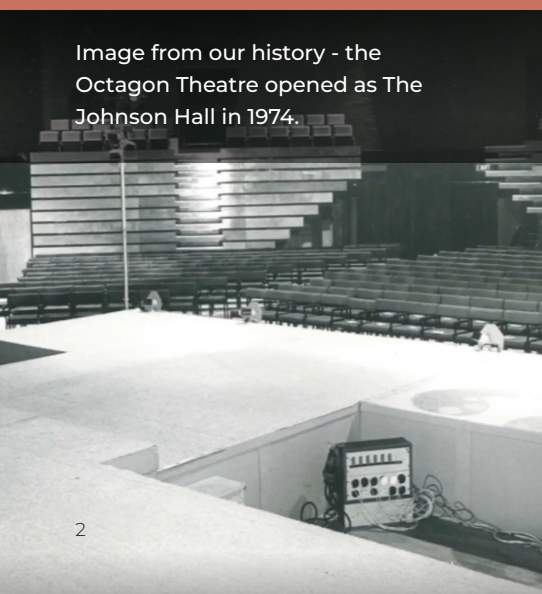
The Octagon Theatre is the largest and principle theatre in Somerset having opened in 1974 (known as The Johnson Hall). Millions of people have been entertained in our theatre and each year we present a diverse programme of artists and events, from big name comedians, classical music, as well as superb plays and ballets, and our yearly blockbuster pantomime. The theatre is home to a thriving amateur scene, and each year around 125,000 people purchase a ticket for an event, attracting audiences from across the South West and beyond.

While much loved, the Octagon Theatre has long been in need of investment to address access issues throughout the building but particularly affecting the backstage area which has remained relatively untouched since the 1970s. The auditorium needs refurbishing and

improved technical facilities would support bigger productions. The front of house areas are in need of refurbishment and additional toilets, while the studio is hampered by a pillar in the middle of the room. The theatre seeks to improve catering facilities and upgrade outdated building services.

The Octagon Theatre is well placed geographically to serve the region with the organisation, under the management and support of Yeovil Town Council, having the financial track record and robust plan to develop the theatre for the next 50 years and beyond.

Image from our history - the Octagon Theatre opened as The Johnson Hall in 1974.





# CURTAIN UP ON TOP-NOTCH ENTERTAINMENT ON YOUR DOORSTEP!

Our proposals see the Octagon Theatre developed, refurbished and renewed to secure the theatre for future generations.

- The auditorium will be refurbished with new seating, carpets, maintaining our excellent leg room, comfort and sightlines
- A new studio will be the perfect place for classes in dance, music, drama and theatre, and creative art. A home for our popular choirs, dance and theatre groups, and arts and craft workshops.
- A greatly improved café bar area open throughout the day for the public and patrons to enjoy and relax.
- Improved front of house and customer facilities with a large increase in toilet provision with toilets on each level, more accessible toilets, gender neutral toilets and a Changing Places facility.

- Accessibility is improved throughout the venue, both front of house and backstage.
- Improvements to the stage house and backstage area will significantly improve the technical aspects of our productions.
- The Octagon Theatre would become The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's "home in Somerset".
- The proposals create a "flagship cultural hub for Somerset" with investment of £10m from government on the building project and ongoing investment through Arts Council England for our Arts Engagement & Outreach programme and The Octagon Music Hub Lead Organisation for music education in Somerset and Dorset.





# FUNDING THE PROJECT

The total project budget is £15m, that includes contingency and allowances for inflation, with funding made up of:

Government Funding (DCMS)	£10,000,000
Yeovil Town Council	£3,750,000*
Ticket Levy - Existing funding generated by users of the Octagon Theatre and Westlands Entertainment Venue	£541,000
Fundraising and other grants	£444,000
Somerset Council	£265,000

**Total** **£15,000,000**

*\*funding from Yeovil Town Council is proposed to be a combination of funding from reserves and borrowing, a proportion of which would be repaid via the Ticket Levy. This funding is subject to a public consultation with Yeovil Town Council residents.*

The project is being managed by Somerset Council who will deliver the project and upon completion, the Octagon Theatre will be transferred to Yeovil Town Council who will operate the theatre as a 'sister' venue to Westlands Entertainment Venue (already operated by Yeovil Town Council).

Artist impression of the proposed Octagon Theatre entrance



The development of the Octagon Theatre will provide an economic boost for Yeovil and the surrounding area. Creating jobs and supporting the local economy and town centre. Whilst the economic basis for development is compelling, this project is also about improving the health and wellbeing of everyone living within our county and beyond.

### Timescale

**2025** - Structural plans have been completed and approved. We will now move into more detailed design work. Yeovil Town Council will undertake consultation with residents on whether they wish to support

the project and see the theatre reopened. Planning permission will be submitted towards the end of the year.

**2026** - The designs are finalised and a contractor is appointed with construction commencing.

**2027/28** - Construction works take place with key milestones throughout the year.

**2028/29** - Construction work is completed and the building is decorated and furniture and equipment installed. There is a period of commissioning, snagging and training as staff move back into the Octagon Theatre and reopen the theatre.



Artist impression of the proposed Octagon Theatre lobby

# QUESTIONS:

## Could the money be spent on something else?

The £10m of government funding was allocated specifically to the development of the Octagon Theatre. If the funding were to be withdrawn or the development were not to go ahead it would return to the treasury and could not be allocated to another project in Yeovil or Somerset.

## Why can't you reopen The Octagon until building works start?

When The Octagon was closed all equipment was taken out of the theatre and invasive survey works took place. There would be significant costs and work needed to make repairs and get the theatre ready to operate along with the recruitment and training of staff and volunteers to operate. Programming for shows and tours takes place 6-18 months in advance. Development of the Octagon Theatre would see the theatre close again in 2026

## Why not just leave The Octagon as it was? Does it really need development?

The theatre is 50 years old and was not originally built as a theatre. There are a number of issues with the theatre in its current form; access backstage is very poor, access front of house is poor, there is a lack of toilet provision, the theatre is dated, tired and in need of development. The Octagon Theatre is in need of development to secure its long-term future. The £10m of government funding is a rare opportunity.

## What will happen to The Octagon if Yeovil Town residents do not support the project or the project does not go ahead?

The development project would not be viable without the funding from Yeovil Town Council (unless another funder were to come forward). It is likely that the £10m from government would therefore not be awarded and the theatre would remain closed.

## How can I get involved?

Yeovil Town Council will be consulting directly with residents in the summer of 2025. Wider public consultation will take place as part of the planning process later in 2025. Details of fundraising opportunities including "Name A Seat" are available on the Octagon website or at Westlands Entertainment Venue.

The creation of a Flagship Cultural Hub for Somerset has been many years in the making so we would like to thank everyone who has supported our journey so far and helped us to reach this exciting moment. You can follow the progress of the project at our website [octagon-theatre.co.uk](http://octagon-theatre.co.uk)

### Email us:

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### Write to us:

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'Artists' impressions in this document credit and copyright of Burrell Foley Fisher.

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Credit and our thanks to Len Copland who has supplied many of the photos taken in this document.

