

OCTAGON THEATRE CONSULTATION FAQS



Why can't residents who live in neighbouring parishes respond?

The loan would be taken out by Yeovil Town Council. Yeovil Town Council do not have the power to raise the precept of other councils. Only the electorate in the parish of Yeovil are being consulted because any increase in Council Tax by Yeovil Town Council, due to the Octagon project, will not affect residents who do not live within that particular parish.

What is the PWLB?

PWLB stands for Public Works Loan Board. It is a UK government body that historically provides loans to local authorities for capital projects. Though the statutory board was abolished in 2020, its functions continue under HM Treasury and are administered by the UK Debt Management Office (DMO).

There is a process that the Council needs to follow. The questions asked are prescribed by the PWLB. The PWLB will also take into account how we have consulted with residents and we are pleased we have received very positive feedback on our approach to ensure all residents are being contacted and given the opportunity to take part in the consultation.

What if the interest rate increases?

If the council do borrow, it will be at a fixed rate so if interest rates do increase, there will be no fluctuations in the amounts repayable for the period of the loan (20 years).

This means that the annual repayments will remain the same which is better for budgeting purposes.

What does the stamp duty relate to?

Unfortunately, Councils are not exempt from taxes and duties set by HMRC. Upon completion of the project the Octagon Theatre will transfer to Yeovil Town Council. HMRC will view that the £3.75 million contributed to the project is not freely given,

and therefore subject to stamp duty. Advice is being sought, about how this can be challenged.

Have any contributions been secured from other parish councils?

Contributions have not been secured from other parish councils. Yeovil Town Council have received contributions from Yeovil Without Parish Council and East Coker Parish Council for the wider devolution of services

What are the benefits of the project?

- The Octagon Theatre will be developed, refurbished and renewed to secure the theatre for future generations.
- The auditorium will be refurbished with new seating, carpets and some adjustments to layout whilst maintaining excellent leg room, comfort, sightlines and intimacy.
- A Participatory Studio which will become the new home for the Octagon Academy and be the perfect place for classes in dance, music, drama, theatre and creative art. A home for our popular choirs, dance and theatre groups, and arts and craft workshops.
- A greatly improved Cafe Bar area offering food and drink 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 and a Changing Places facility for those with additional needs.
- Accessibility is improved throughout the venue, both front of house and backstage with accessible toilets and showers backstage, and lift access throughout the venue.
- Improvements to the stage house and backstage area will significantly improve the technical aspects of productions. Raising the roof will enable the use of fly cloths and a backstage crossover will support the ambitions of the programme and talented local community groups.

This work creates a more sustainable venue, reduces our carbon footprint, ensures staff and guest facilities are up to date and your enjoyment is uninterrupted.

What is the contingency plan if the project goes over budget?

The project is being led by Somerset Council and incorporates substantial contingency provisions at every stage. While it is impossible to predict every future scenario, significant contingencies have been included, and the project is being rigorously monitored and managed. The Project Team consists of highly experienced

professionals with a proven track record of delivering complex, high-profile projects. Should forecasts indicate a potential overspend, the team is required to apply its expertise to bring the project back within budget while maintaining the agreed outcomes. Ongoing management also includes regular market testing to ensure value and competitiveness.

We have strengthened our approach by incorporating higher levels of contingency into both the budget and the project timeline. The project is subject to robust governance, with all partners operating established processes for risk management, scrutiny, accountability, and ensuring value for public funds.

Our priority is to deliver the best possible outcome, reopening and enhancing The Octagon Theatre as a long-term community asset for future generations. The overall project budget includes strong contingency measures, and responsibility for remaining within budget will rest with the appointed contractor, the Project Team, and the Project Board. The contractor's appointment will be governed by a comprehensive contract that includes clauses designed to manage these obligations effectively.

What level of subsidy will the Octagon be receiving?

The Octagon Theatre has historically received a subsidy to support its operation, which is consistent with other theatres of a similar size and scope.

The subsidy has always been provided on the basis that the theatre operates as a community asset—serving and benefiting local residents. This approach ensures that local amateur and community groups can hire the venue at subsidised rates, enabling them to stage productions that would otherwise be difficult to present locally. As a result, the theatre has been able to deliver a diverse and inclusive programme, including classical music, drama, opera, dance, ballet, and other cultural experiences that residents might otherwise have to travel outside the area to access.

Additionally, the theatre has offered concessions and discounted tickets for lower-income groups, including senior citizens, children, students, those who are unemployed, and individuals with disabilities. The subsidy has also enabled The Octagon to attract additional external funding, such as lottery grants and government support via organisations like Arts Council England.

Many of our services operate under similar principles, requiring subsidies to deliver community-focused outcomes—for example, Yeovil Country Park, South Somerset Heritage Collection, and Yeovil Recreation Centre. We also provide grants to local organisations to help sustain their work. These subsidies do not indicate inefficiency or poor management; rather, they reflect our commitment to delivering high-quality services for the benefit of the community.

Yeovil Town Council has already factored a level of subsidy into the council tax of £209,470 to ensure The Octagon Theatre continues to operate in the interests of residents. Our aim is to manage the theatre efficiently, providing value for money while reducing the subsidy compared to previous years. Should members wish to pursue a more commercially driven operating model, the service can be instructed to adjust its approach accordingly.

How is the tax base calculated?

The council tax base is the measure of the number of chargeable domestic properties in a local authority's area, expressed as an equivalent number of band D dwellings. The Billing Authority (Somerset Council) provides the Town Council with this figure.

Every domestic property in England is assigned to a council tax band (A to H) on its value. Each band is given a ratio compared to Band D.

	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	Band F	Band G	Band H	Total
Number of dwellings per band	3,619	5,976	2,869	1,177	679	218	69	7	14,614
Ratio to band D	6/9	7/9	8/9	9/9	11/9	13/9	15/9	18/9	
Equivalent Band D	2,412.67	4,648.00	2,550.22	1,177.00	829.89	314.89	115.00	14.00	12,061.67

The council tax base is calculated by adjusting all properties to their band equivalent and factoring in discounts, exemptions, and projected collection rates. Yeovil Town Council's band D equivalent has been adjusted by 2,569.50. The tax base for Yeovil Town Council is 9,492,17.

Could the money be spent on something else?

The £10m of government funding was allocated specifically to the development of the Octagon Theatre. There are several approval gateways to be met before the funding is confirmed and released prior to construction. If the funding were to be withdrawn or the development were not to go ahead and the funding was declined, it would return to the treasury and could not be allocated to another project in Yeovil or Somerset. The grant of £3.75m from Yeovil Town Council would be made specifically for the Octagon a portion of this funding will also be repaid by users of the theatre via the ticket levy. Other fundraising was given specifically for the development of the Octagon Theatre and cannot be used for other projects.

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.

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 once more. Programming for shows and tours takes place 6-18 months in advance. The number of staff working across both venues was also reduced and it would take time to recruit and train staff. 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?

We all miss the Octagon Theatre very much. The theatre is 50 years old and was not originally built as a theatre. There are several 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. While we all want to see the Octagon back open, we believe the chance to develop the theatre and secure its long-term future is worth the wait. We are also unlikely to see £10m of national funding for the Octagon again in our lifetime and believe it would be a shame to miss out on this opportunity.

Could you develop a smaller/cheaper scheme?

The Octagon Theatre project is being led by Somerset Council, and the theatre currently remains under their ownership. Working in partnership with Yeovil Town Council, the project team have developed these proposals seeking to respond to historical issues with the building and ensure the theatres success for future generations. We believe the £3.75m offered, in principle, by Yeovil Town Council (as voted on by members) has meant that the grant of £10m from government has remained in place. If we now seek a different proposal, it is likely this funding will be lost and any investment we do make will result in a far smaller refurbishment that is likely to mean most of the issues will remain with the building.

What is the economic benefit to the town?

The development and reopening of The Octagon Theatre is expected to generate £9m per year for the local economy. It will create jobs and support our town centre business particularly hotels, restaurants, shops, the wider hospitality sector and attract visitors and businesses to the town. The theatre, and activity at the theatre, also raises tens of thousands of pounds every year for local charities. Culture is often used as a successful way to regenerate towns, improving health and well-being and being a source of education and raising aspirations.

Why should I pay for it? I don't use it or can't afford to go.

We believe theatre is for everyone. The Octagon Theatre offers an accessible pricing scheme offering heavily discounted or free tickets to ensure the theatre is affordable for all. The same scheme is also offered for The Octagon Academy participatory classes. As a regional theatre the programme of events at The Octagon has always strived to offer "something for everyone" and we are committed to broadening our programme.

What happens next?

There is a process that needs to be followed. Yeovil Town Council will collate the responses and use the results to support the application to borrow £3.325 million. Before sending to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government for Secretary of State Approval, the application will be sent to Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC). SALC will check that the application has been completed correctly; that the relevant criteria has been met; and that the form is accompanied with other mandatory documentation.