

MAYOR OF LONDON

Tom Copley AM
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
More London
London SE1 2AA

Our ref: MGLA300713-2493

Date: 18 NOV 2013

Dear Tom

Re: London's small theatres

Thank you for your letter of 25 July.

I welcome *Centre Stage, Supporting Small Theatres in the Capital* and I am grateful to you for leading this timely enquiry which builds a picture of the state of London's small theatres. I am encouraged to see that despite the challenges and current economic conditions, new small theatres continue to open and audiences are growing.

Small theatres make a vital economic and cultural contribution to London. Their unique artistic impact is rivalled only by New York's Off-Broadway and Edinburgh's Fringe. They are a key part of the theatrical ecosystem and laboratories for tomorrow's talent contributing to successful careers in theatre, film and TV.

Renowned actors such as, Simon Callow, Kenneth Branagh and Maggie Smith all started at London's 'fringe' and some make a stellar return, like BAFTA award-winner Linda Basset, who recently played at the Arcola theatre. Small theatres like Olivier Award winner Theatre 503 are hot-houses for new writing. They are also leading the way in staging productions in unexpected venues, for instance Punchdrunk's use of deserted buildings.

I am a passionate champion of small theatres and the contribution they make to London's cultural, social, and economic life. I have recently invested £1m in the Lyric's capital development which will see the theatre as the major regeneration force in the Hammersmith area. In 2012, I funded the largest outdoor theatre festival delighting half a million Londoners, half of whom were new audiences.

I have recently published *Culture on the High Street* which shows the impact and value of culture in town centres and I have also initiated *Circulate*, a theatre touring initiative with outer London venues. I encourage Boroughs to support small theatres as key to the regeneration of an area, such as the Ovalhouse in Lambeth.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Small theatres are an intrinsic part of the GLA's programme of festivals and cultural campaigns and my funding for London & Partners ensures that theatre is a key offer to London visitors.

Over the last three years, I have made numerous visits to theatres and undertaken effective lobbying to reduce red tape which threatens the growth and vitality of the sector; this includes the successful introduction of a new visitor visa for artists, and lobbying on leafleting licensing and parking restrictions.

I welcome the practical set of actions included in the report to help small theatres flourish. Please find enclosed my response.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Boris Johnson', written in a cursive style.

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London

Enc.

MAYOR OF LONDON

Centre Stage, Supporting Small theatres in the capital Response to key actions for the GLA

The Mayor welcomes the report's broad definition of 'small theatres', one that includes the plethora of venues in the capital including small independent, commercial, subsidised and amateur theatres alongside open air, pop-up and temporary venues. London's small theatres range from the Finborough Theatre, Hoxton Hall, Pleasance Theatre and the recently opened Park Theatre, to the more established theatres like The Almeida, Battersea Arts Centre and Bush Theatre.

The report also identifies theatres above 300 seats that are located outside Zones 1-2, for example Artsdepot in North Finchley and the Queen's Theatre in Hornchurch and although these have not been included in the report's enquiry, they may also benefit from the findings and recommendations. The Mayor recognises that what makes London's theatre landscape unique, is the rich tapestry of venues which contribute to a thriving sector.

To implement the recommendations and coordinated action plan will require partnership with a number of organisations including the Arts Council England, London Councils, London & Partners, Transport for London and the Theatres Trust as well as theatres themselves.

The Mayor will continue to support small theatres working with and encouraging cultural institutions, local authorities and strategic funding bodies in their efforts to ensure that high-quality cultural provision is expanded and enhanced across the entire London region' as stated in the Mayor's culture strategy.

The Mayor agrees in principle with many of the report's recommendations and his detailed response is included below.

1. Appointing a new Mayoral Ambassador for small theatres, who can help bring the sector together to deliver the action plan.

The Mayor has an existing mechanism in place to champion small theatres in London through the statutory Cultural Strategy Group. Appointing a Mayoral Ambassador would create an additional layer and may weaken the authority and influence of the statutory theatre advisors.

The Mayor has made the following appointments who are ambassadors for London's theatre:

- Nick Allott – Managing Director, Cameron Mackintosh Company, leading West End theatre producers
- Charlotte Jones – CEO of Independent Theatre Council, industry body for small and medium scale theatre sector
- Tracey Cooper – CEO ArtsDepot, small theatre and representative for outer London theatres.

As industry representatives, the theatre advisors are well placed to offer excellent expertise on how to bring the sector together and take the report's recommendations forward. The Cultural Strategy Group has informed the response to the Small Theatres report and dedicated a meeting to discuss the state of London's theatre on 12 November 2013.

MAYOR OF LONDON

2. Considering how small theatres can play a greater role in new or existing cultural festivals organised by the GLA.

Small theatres have a key role to play in cultural festivals organised by the GLA, bringing attention to the venues and their programmes. As the report notes, in 2013, the festival of contemporary Arab culture, Shubbak, included performances in small theatres like the Cockpit, the Lion & Unicorn and Rich Mix. Shubbak was an initiative established by the Mayor in 2011, and is now an independent biennial festival.

Other examples include *Story of London, East* and *Open Rehearsal*, festivals led by the GLA which included The Arcola, Polka Theatre and Camden Arts Centre amongst many others. Currently, the Mayor has initiated *Circulate*, a three year scheme to widen audiences with small venues including Tara Arts Studio, Harrow Arts Centre, the Albany, Millfield Theatre, Watermans Arts Centre and ArtsDepot.

The Mayor will draw from these examples and continue to involve small theatres in festivals and programmes where appropriate. In addition, the Mayor will explore the idea of a more dedicated campaign to promote local theatres as part of his events programme in 2014/15.

3. Allowing small theatres to place a poster at their local tube, DLR, tram or Overground station, when there is unsold advertising space.

The Mayor acknowledges you have written separately to Transport for London and they have submitted a response to the report.

The Mayor champions culture across London's transport network. This includes the flagship project Art on the Underground as well as a number of cultural campaigns as part of the Mayor's advertising allocation. The Mayor will continue to work with Transport for London to ensure theatres are part of the cultural offer in the marketing outlets available within Transport for London.

4. Ensuring that the Visit London website run by London & Partners promotes the whole theatre sector, not just the West End.

The Mayor acknowledges you have written separately to London & Partners and they have submitted a response to the report.

The Mayor funds London & Partners which is tasked with promoting London's cultural attractions. Theatre information occupies a prominent space in the Visit London website and includes small theatres such as Camden People's Theatre, Hoxton Hall, Diorama Theatre, and The Yard. The Mayor will ensure that the Society of Independent Theatres and the London Theatre Consortium are aware of how small theatres can benefit from featuring information in Visitlondon.com.

The GLA Culture team and London & Partners are exploring a cultural tourism strategy. This will include small theatres as part of a vision to promote London's fuller cultural offer: the 'small and beautiful' experiences alongside the 'big and bold' tourist attractions.

MAYOR OF LONDON

5. Encouraging bidders for GLA regeneration funds to consider how upgrading local theatre venues can form part of their regeneration projects.

Theatres make a vital contribution to the regeneration of areas and town centres providing a community infrastructure and stimulating a night-time economy. The Mayor supports initiatives which embed culture as part of improving the physical environment and economic vitality of London's neighbourhoods.

Through the Outer London Fund, the Mayor is working with Boroughs to make the most of opportunities which exist on the High Street in the face of a decline in retail so as to encourage social, cultural and civic uses. Local theatres play an important role in this process. As the report notes, theatre does not only happen in buildings. In 2012, the Mayor funded *Showtime*, the largest outdoor theatre festival in London taking place in every Borough reaching half a million people, 96% of which stated the events added to the vibrancy of the city.

London Boroughs already include theatres as pivotal features to town centre improvement schemes. For example, Lambeth Council's Somerleyton Road project in the heart of Brixton, places the Ovalhouse theatre at the core of the new development. In July 2013, GLA Land and Property Limited selected a developer for its Newington Butts site at Elephant & Castle in Southwark which includes a Section 106 planning requirement to provide a theatre space for Southwark Playhouse. As noted below, the new development of the Lyric Theatre will be major contributor to the regeneration of the area.

The Mayor works closely with Business Improvement Districts and High Street initiatives to promote culture as a component of making a place attractive to live and work. A good example is *Culture on the High Street*, a guide published by the Mayor in 2013 to help local authorities, town centre managers and Business Improvement Districts to improve the quality and ambition of cultural provision on London's high streets. There are currently a number of projects in development to promote small venues in Business Improvement District, for example in the new MidTown BID.

The Mayor will continue to champion culture and raise opportunities for small theatres to be part of regeneration initiatives.

6. Considering a new innovation capital fund to help theatres upgrade their venue and lever in other sources of funding

The Mayor recognises that many small theatres require capital investment to upgrade and renovate the buildings and acknowledges the challenges facing small theatres to raise capital funds. However, no funds are currently available to start a new capital fund.

Instead, the Mayor has supported well-considered capital projects which have the potential to make a genuine contribution to the cultural, social and economic life of the city. For example, the Mayor has recently invested £1m in the new capital development for the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith which will enable the theatre to engage more widely with young people across the Borough and underpin its position as the West London theatre hub.

Another example is the Mayor's work investigating how RE:FIT, a multi award-winning energy efficiency programme, can facilitate investment and improve financial sustainability for theatres and performing arts venues across London. The Mayor also published the *Theatre's Green Guide* which many small theatres have benefited from. Small theatres can also access help and advice from the

MAYOR OF LONDON

Carbon Trust to become sustainable businesses through carbon reduction and energy-saving strategies.

The Mayor welcomes the Arts Council's response to the report which invites small theatres to apply for capital funding and allows for applications below £100,000. The Mayor also welcomes the Theatres Trust's recently established Theatres Protection Fund, which provides small grants to theatres for repairs and renovations and has already attracted funds from the Andrew Lloyd Weber Foundation and other high profile West End producers.

7. Coordinating bids for funding from the Arts Council's Creative Employment Programme, supporting small theatres to run joint apprenticeship schemes.

The Mayor is committed to advocating for apprenticeships and young creative talent across the industry, to open up routes, increase opportunities and diversify workforce. This is part of a wider commitment to deliver 250,000 apprenticeships across the city by 2016.

Small theatres play a vital role in providing an entry route to employment for writers, actors, directors, designers and producers in theatre. Workforce development in small theatres also impacts on the development of talent in the creative industries; for example, in film and TV.

In 2012, the Mayor initiated the Culture Squad, which delivered apprenticeships in partnership with Barbican, Roundhouse, Albany, Watermans and English National Ballet. This programme is under evaluation and the GLA is exploring ways to replicate it subject to funding being available.

The Creative Employment Programme, led by the Creative and Cultural Skills Council and funded by the Arts Council, has given an additional impetus to paid apprenticeships in the creative sectors. The programme addresses the challenges facing small businesses and encourages partnerships and consortium bids. Delivery models within the small theatre sector are already emerging.

For example, the London Theatre Consortium, a group of 13 theatres led by the Lyric, and including the Unicorn and Greenwich theatres, has successfully secured 38 apprenticeships across the next two years. The Independent Theatre Council is already brokering a meeting between the Lyric and the Society of Independent Theatres to explore how its model can be replicated.

8. Identifying available buildings – including City Hall – that may be available for use as performance or rehearsal space for small theatre groups.

The increase in property prices in the capital has a big impact on culture posing challenges to theatres alongside other community infrastructure such as artist studios, galleries, independent cinemas and small music venues.

The Mayor is exploring how access to affordable creative workspace can be addressed in a number of ways. For example, the GLA on behalf of the London Enterprise Panel are in the process of commissioning an investigation into Workspace provision for SMEs across London with a focus on incubator, accelerator and co-working spaces. The GLA's Culture Team is working with the Regeneration and Business Policy Team to explore synergies between this study and provision of affordable workspace for the creative sector.

Another example is the Mayor's scheme *Circulate*, which has already resulted in new outdoor theatre spaces, pop-up venues on the high street and rehearsal spaces in empty shops. The Mayor's *Theatre's Green Guide* also provides advice on reducing running costs.

MAYOR OF LONDON

London boroughs are already implementing schemes to make use of vacant retail space by, for example, providing support to creative businesses and opening up spaces for community groups. The Mayor recognises there are costs associated with the animation of vacant units – e.g. business rates and staff time – and success is dependent on a landlord's goodwill.

The Mayor also acknowledges that rents are a significant issue for small and medium businesses. To that effect the Mayor published Town Centres and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), which includes guidance to 'support a vibrant mix of uses in town centres including retailing, leisure, culture, tourism, business, social infrastructure and housing'.

Space for theatre performances and rehearsal use must meet adequate requirements which may include lighting, changing rooms, storage, access to water and restroom facilities. Spaces also need to be consistently available for periods of between one and four weeks on a full time basis.

City Hall Facilities have advised that spaces at City Hall are used to 90% capacity. There are noise restrictions before 6 pm and space could not be guaranteed in advance as the GLA is required to meet income targets from private hires and bookings are updated on a daily basis. Additional security, engineering and cleaning costs would have to be met by the theatre companies. These conditions will pose a challenge for theatre groups seeking consistent rehearsal space.

The Mayor allows performances in City Hall when appropriate. The Chamber has in the past hosted a number of cultural events. For example, for the launch of the culture strategy City Hall was transformed into an arts venue with performances across the building.

London Boroughs can benefit from *Meanwhile use lease and guidance notes for landlords* published by the Department of Communities and Local Government which have been prepared to encourage the temporary occupation of empty town centre retail premises by non-commercial occupiers. The GLA will explore the best channels to promote this lease among small theatres.

The database of empty shops suggested in the report would be useful for theatre groups, providing these offered appropriate spaces for rehearsal and/or performance. In order for the database to be a useful resource, it would need to capture the landlord's details and appropriateness of each venue. It would also need to be kept up to date regularly, as London's high streets go through rapid changes. However, local boroughs would need to dedicate resources to this initiative.

However, small theatres can benefit from the existing searchable database administered by the meanwhile Space Project on www.meanwhilespace.com which works closely with local authorities to keep an up to date list of empty properties available for meanwhile use.

The Mayor welcomes the recommendations in the report to encourage theatres to register as a community asset and benefit from the Localism Act 2011 and for the Theatres Trust to provide further guidance in this area.

November 2013