

the **Lights**
andover



The Lights 4 Year Business Plan 2015-2019

Owned and managed by
Test Valley
Borough Council 



This business plan embraces the ambitions of Test Valley Borough Council's Corporate Plan – "Investing In Test Valley"



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As the Lights enters its ninth year of trading, we are excited to embark on a new business plan to build on our achievements over the last eight years and capitalise on our successes, as we look forward to undertaking exciting challenges and developments over the coming years by building an entrepreneurial business model.

Thriving and excellent theatres are central to creating great destinations that attract visitors and encourage them to spend money in the wider local economy and The Lights is no different, with its determination to give visitors from both the local community and further afield the best experience possible and put Andover firmly on the map.

Local government has historically always played a key role in the country's arts landscape and despite many cuts to funding for regional theatres and arts centres over the last few years, Test Valley Borough Council has continued its commitment to The Lights and from 2015 will be the core funder of the venue.

“It has always been my aim to have a thriving theatre in the town. This new business plan sets the stage for a very exciting future”

Ian Carr, Leader - Test Valley Borough Council

This business plan embraces the ambitions of Test Valley Borough Council's Corporate Plan – “Investing In Test Valley” – which focuses on devoting our energy, skills and resources to achieving the best results for our communities across the Borough.

More specifically, The Lights Business Plan will set out actions for the venue's ambitions and aspirations over the coming years and how these can be explored and realised. As a result, it will directly contribute towards the Council's goal of ensuring the borough remains a great place to:

- Work and do business
- Enjoy the natural and built environment
- Contribute and be part of a strong community

This Business Plan will be taken forward in keeping with the council's operating model which describes the way we do business. This approach enables a full business assessment of the activities and opportunities that come forward, so that we can make the right decisions about where and how to invest our energy, skills and resources. As a result, we will be confident that we are taking an efficient and effective approach and delivering value for money for residents and service users.

Key to achieving this Business Plan will be the strong support of our enthusiastic staff and loyal volunteers as we look forward to a future in which we can continue to grow and expand through the continued commitment of Test Valley Borough Council.



Thriving and excellent theatres are central to creating great destinations that attract visitors and encourage them to spend money in the wider local economy



A busy programme of live professional performances remains at the very heart of The Lights and the venue will continue to deliver a strong artistic programme in both the main auditorium and arena areas over the coming years, incorporating a broad spectrum of shows and events with solid audience appeal including comedy, live music, theatre, dance, family theatre and special interest events.

Comedy has been a particular success at The Lights since the venue opened in 2006 and the venue has developed a privileged reputation as a theatre where top-named comedians try out new material or warm up for large-scale national tours. It is essential however, that strong working relationships with agencies are maintained to ensure the venue continues to benefit from these events. To support the comedy programme and through co-promoting monthly professional comedy performances with Manford's Comedy Clubs, The Lights will also look to increase audiences for slightly lower profile comedians.

“Thank you so much for letting us get the tour underway

Al Murray

Dance has been a difficult genre to programme at The Lights and the current programming is in the main concentrated around ballet. The business plan aims to develop new partnerships in this area to improve dance programming and participation and to attract new audiences.

Theatre remains a very important part of the artistic programme and establishing strong working relationships with a number of small-scale touring theatre companies has been key to the increased success of the theatre programme over recent years. In addition, the venue has worked to increase schools audiences for these productions to create a sustainable audience for professional touring drama.

“A lovely intimate venue to play
– thanks for having us
Blackeyed Theatre

The Lights will also look to develop programming in disability arts and both dance and theatre will be a particular focus for this strand of work.

Over recent years, the music offer in the arena area has significantly increased its audience base, not only for standing concerts, but also for smaller scale folk, blues and roots music. Use of artists and bands that have appeared in the Hog The Limelight rural touring programme and have appeared at the annual Larmer Tree Festival, have had a particular impact on increasing audiences for the wider music offer, however technical capabilities in the arena space remain limited.



“My first time attending an event in the arena - worked very well as people got up to dance after a few songs by the UB40 tribute band. Good times. I've been several times now and am preparing to buy more tickets!”

Trip Advisor



Live professional performances remain at the very heart of The Lights and the venue will continue to deliver a strong artistic programme in both the main auditorium and arena areas over the coming years



Action	Detail	Aim	Owner	Date
Maintain an average audience capacity in excess of 70%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure high quality mixed professional programme • Increase circulation of schools newsletter • Research and monitor programming at other local arts venues • Develop group booking incentives • Develop Spotlight Member Offer 	Increase total number of ticket sales for the professional artistic programme Encourage current audiences to attend more frequently	Venue Director Marketing Manager	March 2016
Increase audiences for family events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Kidz Club • Work in partnership with other local service providers to co-promote children's theatre events • Develop participatory workshops for families • Develop Family Friendly offer 	Increase attendances for family theatre and creative workshops	Marketing Manager	December 2016
Increase number of new customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target new communities • Develop new comedy audiences through partnership with Manford's Comedy Clubs • Raise profile of The Lights through social media sites • Identify barriers and make programme accessible to local community • Attend three external community events per year 	Widen the reach of customers at The Lights within the local area	Venue Director Marketing Manager	September 2016
Develop disability arts performances within the artistic programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In partnership with organisations including Blue Apple Theatre, develop creative classes and workshops for people with disabilities • Provide free participatory workshops for schools linked to performances • Programme at least one professional theatre and dance performance per year 	Develop the artistic programme to incorporate theatre and dance performances for and by people with disabilities	Venue Director	January 2016
Develop the range of dance performances at The Lights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in partnership with New Dimensions to develop creative dance opportunities at the venue • Offer free participatory workshops for schools and dance schools linked to performances • Programme at least one contemporary/jazz/street dance performance per year 	Develop the artistic programme to incorporate a wider range of dance performances	Venue Director Arts Officer	March 2016

3. Operations and Trading

The business of running theatres has changed; theatres are adapting and becoming more financially robust, strengthening the social role they have to play and developing a diverse range of activities to serve their communities.

The Lights endeavours at all times to make full use of its facilities making the building as welcoming as possible and opening up the space for a wide range of community use. Additional revenue brought into the venue from conference and hiring facilities, arena café bar and box office facilities has become an essential part of financial planning, having grown significantly since the venue commenced trading. The Lights will continue to strive to maximise potential use of the venue wherever possible, being busy from morning until night and reaching out to its community, whilst in no way jeopardising the professional programme of entertainment.

To address the increasing footfall at the venue, The Lights will look to develop access to the venue from the town centre through the urban realm project, ensuring that the route to the venue is more processional and accessible than its current 'car-park' route. General car parking provision has been an ongoing issue for The Lights, particularly during the day time for delegates and visitors to conferences and events. However, with the Council now having completed purchase of the former Magistrates Court, it is anticipated that this will offer some improvement to the parking facilities in the near future.

As The Lights nears its tenth anniversary, it is essential that the asset management plan for the venue is regularly updated and implemented, along with a consistent maintenance programme year on year.

The business plan will ensure that there will be an entrepreneurial approach to income generation from secondary spend and in particular, a focus to increase income on the arena café bar, increase the box office agency business and maximise use of all rooms available for hire.

The Lights has a small team of core staff, with only two changes to the core team in the last three years. The core team are supported by a team of casual staff who cover bar and technical operations, with an additional loyal volunteer workforce at the venue. The volunteers working at the venue are committed and enthusiastic about the role they play in providing an excellent front of house service for The Lights and the part they play in enabling the wide range of activities and services that The Lights provides. The venue remains committed to its ethos of providing a number of training opportunities for volunteers and to giving volunteers paid working opportunities where possible.

The staffing structure will play a key role in this area of focus and it is essential that a review of this is undertaken to ensure it remains fit for purpose to address the current and future operations of the venue.



“Improving and delivering new leisure facilities for the Borough” - Enjoy the Natural and Built Environment

Test Valley Borough Council
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The business plan will ensure that there will be an entrepreneurial approach to income generation



Action	Detail	Aim	Owner	Date
Implement Urban Realm project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop artist's brief Work in partnership with Planning, Policy and Transport to support the Town Centre Wayfinding Report Review local brown signage 	To improve access and signage to The Lights from the town centre	Venue Director Arts Officer	March 2016
Increase secondary spend at the venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore use of 'contact-less' technology on the café bar Increase the number of Spotlight Members using the direct debit scheme Maximise café bar profitability Maximise potential for hirings Build Ticket Agency business 	To reduce venue subsidy	Venue Director Finance Officer Operations Manager	March 2016
Maintain high standard of facilities at the venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Install new hearing induction loop Update and implement the asset management plan Implement programme of re-decoration works Monitor depreciation of equipment and programme schedule of replacement 	To ensure that high standards are maintained by implementing a number of key maintenance programmes	Venue Director Operations Manager Technical Officer	Ongoing
Staff Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a full analysis of staff training completed and required Extend 'Welcome Host' training to key frontline staff Increase the number of First Aiders at the venue Continue fact finding visits to comparable arts venues Review the staffing structure to ensure it remains fit for purpose to address current and future needs of the venue 	To value and develop the staffing skills required to ensure continued high standard of service delivery	Venue Director	Ongoing

The Lights has a clear role to play in driving activity towards the centre of Andover and in particular, supporting the night time economy in the town. It is essential that a theatre sits at the heart of its community, with education work, amateur dramatics and outreach work all making a community feel like the venue is their space and instilling a sense of civic pride. The Lights sits at the very heart of the aims of the Test Valley Corporate Plan and is a key player in the council's aim to **"Contribute and be part of a strong community"**.

The Lights endeavours to support local traders and small businesses where possible, not only through supplies and services, but also through promoting discounts at local pubs and restaurants to its Spotlight Members scheme ensuring The Lights is a key contributor to the vitality of the town. In addition, the venue has received increasing support from local businesses through a variety of sponsorship packages.

“Having already been associated with The Lights via their Spotlight Membership scheme, once we heard that the sponsorship for the Comedy Nights was available we didn't hesitate to take on a two year sponsorship, giving us as a business a great platform to showcase ourselves”

Mark Lazenby, Weyhill Fair

Over the period of the business plan, The Lights will look to further develop its use of local suppliers and extend the Spotlight Member offer, to contribute to the night time economy in the town.

The Lights stages performances from many local groups and schools and is proud to be the residence for the Andover Musical Theatre Company, Andover Music Club and Ruby Slippers Show School and be the venue of choice for many other local groups. Over the period of the business plan, the venue will continue to make links with other local performance groups, choirs and societies, providing opportunities for partnership working and growth where possible.

“Due to the high quality venue, location, friendly staff and social aspect, The Lights allows me to deliver weekly dance fitness class in an environment that I consider an asset to my business. I enjoy teaching here several times a week and the feedback from my members is fantastic. The Lights has also provided a social network for my members who enjoy the abundance of fabulous refreshments from the café”

- Fiona Caruana, Dancefit

Although the demographic of visitors to The Lights is ever changing, its primary purpose is to serve the local area and continue in its role as a cultural hub for the town, capitalising on the local community's creative spirit.



“The Lights understands the importance of serving quality live entertainment alongside superior locally sourced fresh coffee”

Gerald Fitzgerald,
Peaberry Coffee

“Improving our town centre” - Work and Do Business

Test Valley Borough Council
Corporate Plan





“We are lucky to have a venue such as The Lights on our doorstep. There is something for people of all ages. I would be lost without the place.”

Facebook

“The thing this town needed, keep the stars coming.”

Audience Member



Action	Detail	Aim	Owner	Date
Contribute and be part of a strong community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Spotlight Member Offer in partnership with local pubs and restaurants • Actively promote local hotels, accommodation and restaurants to customers and artistes • Where possible, use local businesses for supplies and services 	To drive footfall to the town centre	Marketing Manager Sales and Marketing Assistants Operations Manager Finance Office	Ongoing
Increase levels of sponsorship at the venue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review Business Members Group • Develop a wide range of sponsorship packages • Promote season sponsorship 	To reduce venue subsidy and work in partnership with local businesses	Venue Director Marketing Manager	September 2016
Work in partnership with local performance groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide creative opportunities for local performance groups with professional touring companies and artistes • Attract new local groups to perform at the venue • Provide marketing support and advice for local groups 	To be seen as a cultural hub for the town	Venue Director Technical Officer Marketing Manager Arts Officer	Ongoing

5. Audience Development

All theatres need audiences and despite successes, are always looking for more in the belief that the programme that is available could be reaching an even wider audience. How The Lights develops its audiences and visitors sits at the very heart of the business plan.

Over the coming years, The Lights will address the many economic, cultural and physical barriers that prevent local people from attending live performances and by working in partnership with a variety of organisations, will aim to identify the barriers and plan to make areas of the programme more accessible to the local community.

A proactive audience development ethos is required to engage and motivate new attenders to The Lights and to increase the frequency of attendance and participation by existing audiences. Audience development begins with a clear understanding of the attitudes and perceptions, both positive and negative, of attenders and non-attenders and through implementation of a wide range of audience feedback mechanisms, The Lights will aim to persuade more local people to engage with the theatre. A thorough understanding of The Lights audience will be factored into overall audience development planning, with a commitment to a longer term marketing approach.





“Contribute and be part of a strong community”

Test Valley Borough Council Corporate Plan





Audience development begins with a clear understanding of the attitudes and perceptions, both positive and negative, of attenders and non-attenders



Action	Detail	Aim	Owner	Date
Stage a Summer Festival	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme a diverse range of music to appeal to a broad community • Develop an accessible pricing structure • Programme creative workshops to appeal to both adults and children • Create opportunities for local musicians and crafts people 	<p>Create a new product for the venue that appeals to new and existing audiences</p> <p>To increase audiences for the arena programme</p> <p>To increase attendances for creative workshops</p>	Venue Director Finance Officer	July 2015
Promote the work of The Lights by presenting to local community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote tours of the venue to local schools, community and social groups • Develop a presentation and 'business plan overview' about the venue • Develop Ambassadors Scheme 	To encourage group bookings for the artistic programme	Marketing Manager	March 2016
Develop cross-promotion techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 'up-selling' training for sales staff • Use functionality of Provenue Connect to target audiences • Use pre-show opportunities to showcase work 	Encourage current audiences to attend more frequently	Venue Director Marketing Manager	December 2016
Implement a wide range of audience feedback methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with touring theatre companies to offer post-show discussions • Use functionality of Provenue Connect to survey customers • Collect and evaluate feedback • Develop exit questionnaires 	To assess quality and appeal of shows and events to feed into the artistic programme	Marketing Manager	September 2016

Theatre and the arts are uniquely placed to reach, inspire and engage people and through creative programming, can help people develop confidence, learn new skills, make friendships and more. Establishing a number of key partnerships over the coming years with organisations including Rare Productions, Blue Apple Theatre, Forest Forge Theatre Company and the New Dimensions in Dance programme, will enhance The Lights outreach and engagement offer, linking directly with its commitment to audience development.

The Lights recognises the role it has to play in the local education community, in particular with programming for drama and theatre. Development of a termly schools newsletter and regular email contact with a schools distribution list has seen a particular increase in attendances from schools and is an area of work that the venue will endeavour to develop further over the coming years. Where possible, The Lights will give opportunities for local schools to be involved in key creative arts projects and will also give opportunities for schools to engage with professional touring companies.

The creative classes and workshops at The Lights, for both children and adults, give participants access to a professional creative environment and space and over the coming years, the venue will develop its offer further to maintain its USP in the face of increased local competition.

“Ignite Youth Theatre helps children to develop in so many ways; it builds confidence, fosters interpersonal skills and allows the actor to explore a range of emotions and situations within a safe environment. At Ignite Youth Theatre the participants range from 6-15 years, they all work together and draw on one another's experience and skills, building new friendships and developing the skills of a professional actor.”

Tabitha Kahney-Smith, Ignite Youth Theatre

With only a small core team, it is important that The Lights carefully considers its response to creative projects that arise to ensure there is synergy with the audience development action plan.



The creative classes and workshops at The Lights, for both children and adults, give participants access to a professional creative environment





The Lights will give opportunities for local schools to be involved in key creative arts projects and will also give opportunities for schools to engage with professional touring companies.



Action	Detail	Aim	Owner	Date
Increase bookings for performances by schools and colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase distribution of schools newsletter • Use functionality of Provenue Connect for targeted mailing • Provide opportunities for schools and colleges to work with professional touring artistes and companies • Maintain ticket subsidy for schools and colleges • Provide pre and post show discussion opportunities for schools and colleges 	Increase access to professional theatre for local children and young people	Venue Director	Ongoing
Increase participation in creative classes and workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop offer for weekly classes to appeal to a broader age range • Work in partnership with Rare Productions to produce summer show for young people • Programme free or subsidised taster sessions • Provide free creative workshops at summer festival to promote workshop programme 	To increase attendance at weekly classes and holiday workshops to enable a wider programme	Venue Director	July 2016
Work in partnership with local professional touring companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide creative opportunities for local people • Widen range of regular creative classes • Provide opportunities for Ignite Youth Theatre 	To create unique creative opportunities for local people		