



Thursday 4 January 2024

## **THE NEW WOLSEY THEATRE URGES RECONSIDERATION OF CULTURAL INVESTMENT CUTS PROPOSED BY SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL**

The multi award-winning New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich, a community hub and cornerstone of Suffolk's cultural landscape, is disappointed by Suffolk County Council's recent announcement of proposed 100% investment cuts to cultural organisations across the region from 2025.

With over four decades of council investment, the theatre is a pivotal force in nurturing creativity and well-being, particularly for young people and communities most in need.

Despite the theatre's consistent efforts and the continued support from Arts Council England and Ipswich Borough Council, the proposed cuts could force the theatre into making difficult decisions about the extent of its ongoing services. The theatre's Chief Executive/Artistic Director, Douglas Rintoul, expressed concern, stating, "These proposals come at a very difficult time for cultural organisations still recovering from the impact of the pandemic and grappling with the added strain of the cost-of-living crisis."

While understanding the economic challenges faced by local governments nationwide, Rintoul emphasised that these proposed cuts would have a significant impact on the theatre's vital work with schools and communities across the county. The New Wolsey Theatre engages with over 150 young people weekly from all backgrounds, including those with disabilities and neurodivergent backgrounds, provides essential support for over 17 community groups across the year, will perform in nearly 40 Suffolk schools this Spring, and gives free or low-cost access to its programs to over 5000 people most at need through community events, live streaming and community ticketing initiatives. The cut in investment represents 80% of the subsidy the theatre currently commits to its life-enhancing engagement programme and because of the current economic crisis, the needs of its communities are greater than ever.

Rintoul added, "The reduction in investment of our engagement initiatives will not only be felt by us but will ultimately cost local government more in the long run. The cultural sector stands at the heart of Ipswich and Suffolk, shaping the region's identity. These proposed cuts could jeopardise the artistic and creative vibrancy of the area and threaten economic growth. The cultural and creative industries generate over £272m for the region\* and

contribute immeasurably to the visitor economy, community wellbeing, sense of identity and enjoyment of life at its every stage.”

A shared statement from DanceEast, Eastern Angles Theatre Company, First Light Festival, The New Wolsey Theatre, Primadonna Festival, Theatre Royal Bury St Edmunds, and Suffolk Artlink - the local organisations impacted by Suffolk County’s proposal to cease investment in the cultural sector from April 2025: “Whilst we will need some time to consider the full impact of these proposals, our immediate concern is how any decision might impact the people of Suffolk. The proposed cut to these organisations will provide an extremely modest difference to the Council’s overall finances, representing a saving of just 0.057% of the Council’s 23/24 revenue budget. However, the ‘cost’ to our County will be so much more significant. Collectively, our organisations support 24,493 children and young people and 76,516 vulnerable\*\* people through our community engagement work. We also provide permanent employment for 154 staff, and project or contract employment for a further 499 staff. Suffolk-wide, the culture sector plays an important part in providing employment for local people, with almost 6,985 jobs\* being supported by the sector. Our organisations, both collectively and individually, call on Suffolk County Council to consider the merit of a small cost saving, compared to the huge impact this will have on communities across Suffolk who benefit from our work.”

\*New Anglia LEP Cultural Evidence report April 2021 Evidence Report

\*\*those over 65, or with disabilities, in receipt of means tested benefits or who are rurally isolated.

We are being asked by our audiences how they can best support us, we recommend that they write to their county councillors. To find your councillor, visit Suffolk County Council's website (<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-elected-representatives/find-your-councillor>).

[www.wolseytheatre.co.uk](http://www.wolseytheatre.co.uk)

## **ABOUT NEW WOLSEY THEATRE**

The New Wolsey is Ipswich’s award-winning theatre. With a 400-seat intimate auditorium, the Theatre is nationally recognised for the quality, diversity and reach of its productions, both as a producer, and in collaboration with a diverse range of visiting artists and companies from across the UK. It is renowned for staging world premieres and landmark revivals of musicals including *Brief Encounter*, *Kinky Boots*, *Made in Dagenham*, *Once* and *The Who’s Tommy* (UK Theatre Award for Best Touring Production), and for its annual Rock ‘n’ Roll pantomime. Douglas Rintoul’s production of Patrick Marber’s *The Red Lion* delighted audiences and critics in Autumn 2023. The theatre has begun a new phase of talent development, with their recent production of Dennis Kelly’s *DNA* providing the professional debut of four local young performers and they recently announced their exciting regional Associate Artists line-up.