

**Alexandra Palace Theatre
Draft Theatre Policy**

Programming policy

- 1.1 London has over 200 theatres of all shapes and sizes. What London doesn't have is the unique, atmospheric and magical theatrical space that is Alexandra Palace Theatre. The Theatre is currently hidden from the public eye and consciousness. It is unlike any other space in London and, when it reopens, will contribute significantly to the capital's wider theatrical community, as well as to the existing family of spaces and activities at Alexandra Park and Palace. Critically, it will reintroduce live theatre in all its forms from spoken drama to opera and musicals, to burlesque and make a welcome contribution to the existing mix of entertainment at the Palace.
- 1.2 Throughout its varied history, the Theatre has played host to many different types of performance, reflecting its spectacular and inventive staging opportunities. This potential will be reborn through the current redevelopment and refurbishment of the East Court, providing not only a revitalised theatre, but also the wider context of welcoming communal spaces including the BBC Studios and generous public areas.
- 1.3 The management and programming of the theatre will reflect the continuing entrepreneurial vision of Alexandra Palace. It will be outward looking, innovative, open to experiment and calculated risk. It will be populist as well as challenging, it will be fun as well as difficult and it will be traditional and experimental.
- 1.4 The revitalised Theatre will continue to host a wide variety of activities, constrained only by the imagination of its users. Although the theatre will be a presenting house that does not produce its own work, it will take responsibility for the quality of the productions and activities that are offered to the public on its behalf.
- 1.5 The management challenge will be to ensure a successful and complementary programme that makes a year round offer to attract many different users and audiences, including both local and existing Alexandra Palace users as well as new audiences from across London.
- 1.6 The Theatre will allow for performances that can spill out into the East Court or into the park, it will allow for music theatre and drama, cinema showings, banquets that might seem lost in the Palace's larger venues, club performances, burlesque, cabaret, and events and performance better suited to a smaller, though still capacious venue. The Theatre

will allow Alexandra Palace to host smaller (though still significant by London theatre capacity standards), intimate, niche, experimental events to complement the popular work in its larger venues.

- 1.7 This programming policy sits alongside and complements that of Alexandra Park and Palace as a single entity. A key element will be to inform other decisions about lettings, commissions and collaborations with other spaces at Alexandra Palace and its supporting spaces (bars, foyers, function rooms, ice rink, BBC Studios and East Court as a whole).

Audience development

- 1.8 Activities and events in the Theatre will contribute towards the profile, positioning and audience development of Alexandra Park and Palace as a whole, as well as specifically to the East Court and BBC Studios. The trust is making a clear commitment to work with the local arts and performance community, as well as local school and colleges, to build local audiences and community support.
- 1.9 We will engage with all the communities in the theatre's catchment area. We will expect productions and performers booking the Theatre to offer behind the scenes tours, outreach workshops, Q&A sessions and discounted school bookings where appropriate.
- 1.10 Alexandra Palace will work with local arts and community groups to develop outreach programmes and collaborations in and about the theatre. We will engage with schools and community groups to build an informed, enthusiastic and critical local audience for performances at the theatre.

Hires policy

- 1.11 Our policy is that productions in the Theatre will need to demonstrate the highest quality in their genre. We will encourage the best performers and companies to visit the theatre by offering competitive deals, excellent support and an engaged audience. We will evaluate prospective hirers proposals on the quality of their production plans, demonstrable track records and supporting marketing and audience development plans.
- 1.12 The Theatre will welcome a wide range of events to be hosted in its space, whether on stage or utilising the flat floor auditorium. However, we may on occasion turn down requests for venue hire because we feel that there may be a conflict with our programming policy. The theatre premises cannot be hired where the business or activities of the hirer or the nature of the event may (in the opinion of the management) be detrimental to the Alexandra Park and Palace status or reputation. The subject matter of events as well as ethos of companies hiring our spaces will always be considered. We will take enquiries from anyone to hire our spaces, but reserve the right to refuse.

- 1.13 Prospective users will be expected to contact us to discuss initial ideas and availability, visit the Theatre to see resources and talk to appropriate staff. We will expect any prospective users to employ or to engage an experienced event producer. Since the Theatre is only technically equipped in basic formats, hirers may need to supplement further technical requirements from their own resources.
- 1.14 All bookings made with the Theatre will be granted strictly for the purposes agreed and will only be accepted on that basis. It will be the responsibility of the hirer to fully disclose the nature of the hirer's proposed programme and activities and the type and content of the event to the management at the time of requesting the booking.
- 1.15 We will hire our facilities at different rates to professional organisations, community groups and charities, and educational establishments, defined as:
- Professional organisations that operate for profit;
 - Community groups that are not profit making. Any surplus generated from activity is retained within the organisation. Community groups may pay suppliers (for example musicians playing at a musical theatre showing) without compromising their status;
 - Charities registered in their own right, submitting an annual return to the Charity Commission, also including social enterprises;
 - Schools are as recognised in either the state or independent sector, plus tertiary and training organisations.
- 1.16 Our customers and audience can expect the highest quality of service when they visit the Theatre. Staff will be polite, informed and helpful. Signage will be informative. Our staff will exceed expectations to create an excellent customer / audience / visitor experience.

Operations policy

- 1.17 The Park and Palace has found a successful balance of music, entertainment, education and fun. The Park and the Palace are open all year round; make more lettings and host more events than ever before in its history. The Theatre will contribute to the vibrancy of Alexandra Palace by bringing theatrical productions into the mix and will work alongside major and smaller events elsewhere in the Palace and Park to widen the range and type of performances, strengthen the financial position of the Trust and increase the range of available spaces in the Palace.
- 1.18 Operationally, the Theatre Manager and the Account Manager (theatre sales) will work closely with their Events and Sales colleagues to make sure that the offer in the theatre complements and neither competes or conflicts with other venues and activities at Alexandra Palace. For instance, until the theatre is in full operation the extent of sound bleed through shared walls with other performance spaces in Alexandra

Palace cannot be fully tested, nor the exact staffing capacity required to manage multiple venues in operation at the same time.

- 1.19 The Alexandra Palace team will continuously explore and learn about the operation of the theatre, integrating it into the wider operation of Alexandra Palace, while maintaining a distinct identity and distinct programming for the Theatre. This programming strategy is therefore a start-up policy for the Theatre and will be reviewed and revised as required to find out what works best for Alexandra Palace, its existing and new audiences, the wider theatrical and music world, and our local communities and stakeholders.

Barker Langham Business Plan implications

- 1.20 The Barker Langham Business Plan underpins this Programming and Operations Policy. It projects the financial contribution of the Theatre to Alexandra Palace as:

Year	£K	Cumulative total £K
16/17	-5.0	-5.0
17/18	-41.4	-46.4
18/19	54.5	7.6
19/20	107.0	114.6
20/21	133.2	247.8
21/22	159.5	381.0
22/23	159.5	540.5
23/24	159.5	700.0
24/25	185.7	885.7
25/26	185.7	1,071.4
26/27	185.7	1,257.1

- 1.21 The Theatre is planned to be a self-supporting revenue unit. Initial financial projections have been sensibly modest. Early tasks will be to fully understand the operating costs of the theatre, so that the correct cost of a seat (in all the possible configurations) and the cost of the auditorium (as an unseated venue) can be appreciated by the management and external users alike. Equally, how the bar and foyer, the First Floor Function Room and other bookable spaces will be costed for lettings.
- 1.22 In this context, the Theatre management will be able to test the business plan in greater detail against the programming policy, operating policy and the 5-year operational plan. However, the £1.27m that the theatre is expected to contribute towards Alexandra Palace's revenue over 10 years remains yet to be proven. Revisions to the business plan may need to rephrase the positive financial contribution of the Theatre.

Background

- 1.23 The first Theatre at Alexandra Palace opened with a dramatic spectacle with Mlle Rita Sangalli, the premiere danseuse of the Grand Opera Paris, and then promptly closed when it and the rest of Alexandra Palace burned down.
- 1.24 The second Theatre opened in May 1875 with Offenbach's operetta *Breaking the Spell* and a grand spectacular ballet.
- 1.25 The Victorian Directors of Alexandra Palace and of the theatre had ambitions to stage operatic and dramatic performances and encourage "dramatic tastes which are not too low to merit cultivation". The many different managements of the theatre started with lofty ambitions, but ended with performances such as *Chippis in Japan (1898)*, a musical comedy featuring oriental dancers, a fire eater, Sudanese performers and the celebrated Levy family from Algiers. While theatre and opera performances continued after Alexandra Palace became publicly owned, the theatre was adapted to show films and became a popular cinematograph. After the First World War the theatre was refurbished by its then General Manager and then used as a rehearsal space and a West End try out. In the 1930's the BBC used the Theatre as a prop store and effectively ended its use as a performance space.
- 1.26 The Theatre was designed primarily for music theatre, drama and spectacle and, essentially, as a receiving house. While there were occasional resident companies, for instance the autumn residencies of the Carl Rosa Opera Company in 1875 and 1876, most of the productions were by touring and visiting companies, or short lived ad-hoc companies formed by the Theatre's management for specific productions.
- 1.27 The Theatre's legacy of spectacular and inventive staging of musical theatre in all its forms has been identified in the Barker Langham Business Plan for the theatre, and is wholly reflected in this programming and operations policy.