

# St George's Guildhall and Creative Hub

## Final Evaluation Report – Development Phase

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 St George's Guildhall

St George's Guildhall in Kings Lynn is a site of historic significance, locally, regionally and nationally. It is owned by the National Trust (NT) and leased to the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk (BCKLWN) who manage and maintain the site.

Construction of the Guildhall was completed by 1400 and was already in the possession of the Guild of St George at this time. The first royal letters patent allow the guild to keep the site and guildhall and quay that they have built. There are other later (16<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century, and even 20<sup>th</sup> century) buildings within its vicinity; together these have served a variety of purposes over the years. The hall itself has been a public space, courthouse, school and munitions store. One of its longest serving purposes is as a theatre which it still is today. In fact, it is now identified as the UK's oldest working theatre. Until very recently, the Guildhall site also offered exhibition space (Fermoy Art Gallery) and a multi-use space for events and education activities, and other spaces to local organisations such as Collusion, an arts organisation, and to community theatre groups such as Kings Lynn Players and Kings Lynn Operatic and Dramatic Society.

Links to English theatre run deep. Robert Armin, Shakespeare's leading comic actor, was born around the corner from St. George's Guildhall in 1565. In 1593, when London theatres were closed because of the plague and theatre companies went on tour, the Earl of Pembroke's Men came and performed in the Guildhall and this evidence is used to support strong oral traditions in the town that Shakespeare himself played in the theatre.

This rich history has been recognised with funding from the UK Government's Towns Fund to support the refurbishment and redevelopment of St George's Guildhall and associated buildings. The project began in 2021 and has included stakeholder engagement sessions, most recently in May 2024 ahead of planning application submission<sup>1</sup>. It is the priority project of the King's Lynn Town Neighbourhood Board<sup>2</sup>, and aims to transform the venue into a nationally important cultural heritage site at the heart of Kings Lynn's arts and culture scene. The project is being led by BCKLWN, in partnership with Norfolk Museum Service (NMS) and Norfolk County Council (NCC) and in collaboration with the NT. Its mission is to conserve and promote King's Lynn's heritage and culture, particularly connections to William Shakespeare, making them accessible and welcoming to all, whilst boosting skills and supporting new business and creative practice. The development will include the building of new studio spaces for creatives and start-up businesses.

The Guildhall closed its doors to public performance on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2025 to commence pre-construction works prioritising archaeology. Prior to this, in 2024, an architectural historian, a theatrical historian and several archaeologists including an architectural archaeologist were

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<sup>1</sup> The timeline to date can be found here: [St George's Guildhall and Creative Hub – Vision King's Lynn](#)

<sup>2</sup> Formerly the King's Lynn Town Deal Board

brought in to carry out a thorough inspection of the entire site and it was during these inspections and testing using dendro-dating that a set of large oak timbers dating back to the early-1400s were identified, within the original area of the Guildhall and where performances, including those of Shakespeare and the Earl of Pembroke's Men were staged. These timbers represent what is thought to be the largest surviving expanse of 15<sup>th</sup> century wooden flooring in Britain.

## 1.2 King's Lynn and its heritage

In 2021, at the last census, the population for the borough measured 154,300<sup>3</sup>. The area is home to a population with an average (median) age that is older than the regional and national averages and 12.3% were born outside the UK; the largest proportion of them (2%) being born in Lithuania. Kings Lynn is home to a large migrant community and 9 of its 89 neighbourhoods fall within the top 20% of most income-deprived in England<sup>4</sup>. Language barriers and social and economic inequalities within the town are important in understanding the context in which its heritage needs to be shared and explored more widely.

Kings Lynn is a vibrant centre for arts, cultural and heritage venues, events and activities<sup>5</sup>. The town was a key Hanse port in the Medieval period, today retaining buildings (Hanse House and Marriot's Warehouse) that are the only surviving buildings of the Hanseatic League in England. The Borough Archives, housed in the Trinity Guildhall, represent records of national and international significance.

In the Business Case for St George's Guildhall and Creative Hub (updated July 2024)<sup>6</sup>, it is recognised that there is a wider catchment area for Kings Lynn (30-45 minute drive) covering 500 sq miles of the Fens, Norfolk, south Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, including the smaller towns of Wisbech, Swaffham, Hunstanton and Downham Market, which comprise circa 250,000 residents. In addition, Audience Agency research shows that there are 2.3m regional residents within a 90-minute drive time. There are also 44,000 National Trust members within a 60-minute drive time and 500,000 overnight tourist visits to West Norfolk. These audiences may all potentially have an interest in cultural activities on offer in Kings Lynn.

Vision King's Lynn represents the collective name for the investment, funding and plans for King's Lynn. The vision for the town is set out in the Town Investment Plan, which presents a number of complementary schemes organised around three key themes: innovative, growing business and skilled workforce; sustainably connected town; historic riverfront and repurposed town centre. St George's Guildhall and Creative Hub sits under the first of these themes. In August 2024, King's Lynn Town Board published the findings of a Long Term Plan for Towns

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<sup>3</sup> [How life has changed in King's Lynn and West Norfolk: Census 2021](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Exploring local income deprivation](#)

<sup>5</sup> For example see [Visitor Guides | Discover King's Lynn](#) and [King's Lynn – Visit West Norfolk](#)

<sup>6</sup> [St Georges Guildhall and Creative Hub Business Case July 2024](#)

Consultation<sup>7</sup> which compiled feedback from 517 people. An inclusive approach to engagement was taken to try to ensure that the views from a wide range of people were heard.

One of the key themes to emerge was that people value the town's heritage and history, its buildings and architecture, its river / waterfront / quayside, but feedback suggested that the town is not making the most of its assets. People were asked about the best and strongest aspects of King's Lynn's heritage. St George's Guildhall was one of the top three buildings receiving a notable mention. However, only 35% of respondents said they visited the venue for creative or cultural things like watching plays, live gigs or festivals (compared with 72% who went to the Corn Exchange).

In 2024, Art Reach was commissioned to lead the development of a 10-year Culture and Heritage Strategy for King's Lynn. After in-depth consultation, followed by stakeholder engagement on the draft strategy, the final document was endorsed and adopted by the Borough Council's cabinet in early March 2025<sup>8</sup>. This also presents a detailed picture of the town's heritage and demographics today.

The co-curated vision for King's Lynn is that "in 10 years, we have a cultural sector that is collaborative, outward-looking and internationally connected, working alongside people and organisations to innovate and animate our rich local heritage."

Achieving this vision will be achieved through four priority themes:

1. **Young People as Makers, Creators and Producers** - the vision is to create an environment where young people in King's Lynn are inspired and empowered to explore their creative potential, equipped with the skills and opportunities to become makers, creators and producers.
2. **Animating King's Lynn heritage** – the vision is to transform King's Lynn into a dynamic, innovative and interactive heritage centre. By animating our rich history through modern storytelling methods, interactive experiences and year-round programming, we aim to make heritage accessible, engaging and relevant to all, especially young people.
3. **Collaborative working for resilience** - the vision is that there is a resilient and thriving cultural sector in King's Lynn because of collaboration amongst a range of people and organisations operating in the heritage and culture sector. Under a shared vision and mission, organisations will be better at demonstrating their impact, have more financial stability and be creating a vibrant cultural landscape that benefits all.
4. **Embedding sustainability, inclusivity and diverse voice in King's Lynn Culture and Heritage** - the vision is a vibrant, inclusive cultural scene in King's Lynn that amplifies diverse voices and celebrates the rich cultural contributions of all local communities. We want every resident and visitor to feel represented, valued and inspired to participate in and contribute to King's Lynn's heritage and culture.

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<sup>7</sup> [Long term plan for town consultation report August 2024](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Culture | Culture | Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk](#)



### 1.3 The scope of this report

It is within the context described above that in October 2023, the authors of this report were commissioned to help the project team, comprising representatives from BCKLWN, NT and NMS, to formulate and answer a series of key questions. These questions related to having a better understanding St George's Guildhall's audiences during the final months of operation before the venue was expected to close for refurbishment.

This report covers a response to the questions (highlighted in **blue** in the body of the report). It is organised into the following areas of delivery:

- Events and exhibitions;
- Education programme - formal and informal activities in school term and school holidays;
- Community engagement with key audiences.

Data that has been used to inform a response to these key questions includes:

- Audience feedback via...
  - written surveys, both online and on paper;
  - conversations with the report authors, staff and volunteers;
  - a comments book.
- Observational data on audiences at events.
- Quantitative data trends that have emerged from the collation of this information, where possible.

## 2. Use of the Guildhall: a picture through numbers

The following page presents figures for in-person visitor engagement with the Guildhall and its team of staff and volunteers over a recent two-year period (2023 and 2024). This reveals a trend for increasing visitor engagement with the venue and the activities and events it offered; overall the total number of engagements have increased from 20,246 to 28,928, a rise of 42.9%. The majority of this activity took place in St George's Guildhall itself, with a small proportion accounted for by off-site (outreach) work.

The overall increase can be broken down as follows, over the two years:

- Visits (e.g. for volunteer-led tours) up 5.6%
- Box Office (theatre) visits up 21.5%
- Formal and informal learning (children and young people) visits up 148.7%
- Gallery (exhibitions) visits up 41.9%
- Engagement in off-site activities up 267.5%

Some increase may be attributed to improving public confidence, as patterns in leisure behaviour return to those more akin to pre-Covid-19 Pandemic times, and a small proportion will be due to improved data collection procedure, specifically the counting of visits for people using meeting spaces at the venue, which happened consistently from March 2024. A good proportion of the increase is also likely down to additional investment and a focus on delivery in certain areas. For example, the learning programme has seen such a significant uplift in numbers because of the creation of the Learning and Education Office post (Section 4).

Figures quoted in subsequent sections provide a more nuanced picture of the different strands of activity being delivered.

Month	Visits (e.g. tours)	Box Office (theatre)	Children & Young People	Meetings	Gallery (exhibition)	Month Total (On site)	Month Total (Offsite)	<b>20,246</b> total number of engagements (on-site and off-site) in 2023
Jan-23	154	0	84	formal counting of meeting space use began during this year but was not accurate for the whole 12 month period		238		
Feb-23	231	694	84			1009		
Mar-23	343	1761				2104		
Apr-23	474	633	270			1377		
May-23	355	298	63			716		
Jun-23	653	296				949		
Jul-23	694	243			1500	2437		
Aug-23	680	0	224			904		
Sep-23	2761	65	0		1020	3846		
Oct-23	774	1012	61		669	2516	60	
Nov-23	232	1314	773			2319	30	
Dec-23	79	493	1096			1668	73	
<b>Totals 2023</b>	<b>7430</b>	<b>6809</b>	<b>2655</b>		<b>3189</b>	<b>20,083</b>	<b>163</b>	

Month	Visits (e.g. tours)	Box Office (theatre)	Children & Young People	Meetings	Gallery (exhibition)	Month Total (On site)	Month Total (Offsite)	<b>28,928</b> total number of engagements (on-site and off-site) in 2024
Jan-24	220	255	110		0	585		
Feb-24	271	868	362		165	1666		
Mar-24	319	1415	1072	40	140	2986	504	
Apr-24	412	1494	650	27	104	2687		
May-24	520	283	1178	144	0	2125		
Jun-24	707	738	359	305	204	2313		
Jul-24	756	1528	522		1467	4273		
Aug-24	893	67	82		638	1680		
Sep-24	2823	163		350	593	3929	35	
Oct-24	585	527	498	44	999	2653	60	
Nov-24	237	856	909	60	215	2277		



Dec-24	100	78	862	115		1155		
<b>Totals 2024</b>	<b>7843</b>	<b>8272</b>	<b>6604</b>	<b>1085</b>	<b>4525</b>	<b>28329</b>	<b>599</b>	

### 3.Events and Exhibitions

**Event days** operate over a four-hour period and offer a range of immersive, themed activities, such as art and craft, historic characters, animals to hold/touch, games, live music, dramatic or cinematic performances and trails. These events include Shakespeare's Big Birthday Bash (May), Dragon Festival (November), Victorian Christmas (December). They have been repeated over the last 2-3 years and have been free except for Dragon Festival in 2024 for which there was a £2 per person charge.

Events are planned and delivered by Guildhall staff and volunteers and with support from NMS colleagues.

**Exhibitions** in 2024 have included, for example, Lay of the Land (25 September – 26 October) and Magic of Middle Earth (15 June to 14 September). A small sample of visitor feedback is available from the latter, but no audience feedback was collected at Lay of the Land as the surveys were not printed in time. A small sample of visitor feedback from the Heads & Tails Exhibition in 2023 is available, although visitor surveys were implemented part the way through the exhibition.

#### Gallery (exhibitions) attendances

	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
2023						1500		1020	669	
2024	165	140	104		204	1467	638	593	999	215

Events	Adults	Concessions	Children	Total
Shakespeare's BBB 22-23.04.23				178
Dragon Festival 04.11.23	296	55	316	667
Victorian Christmas 10.12.23	162	42	181	385
Shakespeare's BBB 28.04.24	173	54	142	369
Dragon Festival 03.11.24	143	25	153	321
Victorian Christmas 08.12.24	213	81	150	472



Young audiences attending one of the Dragon Festival events

### What do we know about current audiences? What motivates people to come?

**Activities are attracting new audiences and building a loyal following with people returning based on previous positive experiences. We know this because:**

- In 2024, first time visitors made up between 29% and 50% of audiences at large events and exhibitions (depending on the particular event/exhibition). In 2023, at the Victorian Christmas and Dragon Festival, comparative figures were 42% and 60% for first time visitors who had completed a survey.
- Repeat visitors cite previous events and exhibitions that they have attended. The Heads & Tails exhibition tended to attract visitors who were already receptive to contemporary art, although the survey indicated that around half of respondents had not been to the Fermoy Gallery or Shakespeare Barn before. We cannot quantify the positive impact that visitors intent on visiting Guildhall exhibitions have brought to the local economy (because of gaps in data), but the comment below hints that this has taken place:  
*'When we come to Kings Lynn we also shop and have lunch and pay for parking so a net gain to the area.'* (Heads & Tails Exhibition)
- Events are perceived as high quality – Dragon Festival achieved a 4.25/5.00 rating (2024) and 4.50/5.00 (2023); 98.3% of respondents said that they would return for another event at the venue (Shakespeare's Big Birthday Bash 2024); 95% of respondents said they were very likely or likely to return for a future event (Dragon Festival 2024); 100% of respondents said that they would recommend the exhibition to family and friends (Magic of Middle Earth); 97% of people responding to the Heads & Tails exhibition survey said they were likely or very likely to return for future events or exhibitions at the venue.  
*'Absolutely amazing!! Fabulous entertainment, great activities, really fabulous! Thank you!'*
- Guided tours are also valued for offering a high-quality experience. People attending them and providing feedback remark consistently on the breadth of knowledge and enthusiasm of the volunteers who deliver them. Out of nearly 990 comments, only one negative comment was recorded which did not relate to the tours themselves. A fuller breakdown of these comments is provided later.
- People often mention the warm welcome from staff (including volunteers), and this feedback is being received consistently across events and the volunteer tours.
- A 'Mystery Shopper' visit carried out in November 2024 found the volunteer tour guide friendly, knowledgeable and welcoming. The tour was free, although the visitor would have given a donation had a donation point been visible or pointed out. The idea of giving a donation is also mentioned in the visitor comments book.
- There are comments from events that suggest people are pleased that the venue has more to offer after a quieter period, balanced with the odd comment that there are still further opportunities that it could explore.  
*'Great to see this venue being brought back to life!'* (Dragon Festival 2023)

*'The Fermoy is a superb, purpose-built gallery and the Shakespeare Barn a grand space too. The quiet medieval courtyard space outside is very special too and at present all underused' (Heads & Tails Exhibition).*

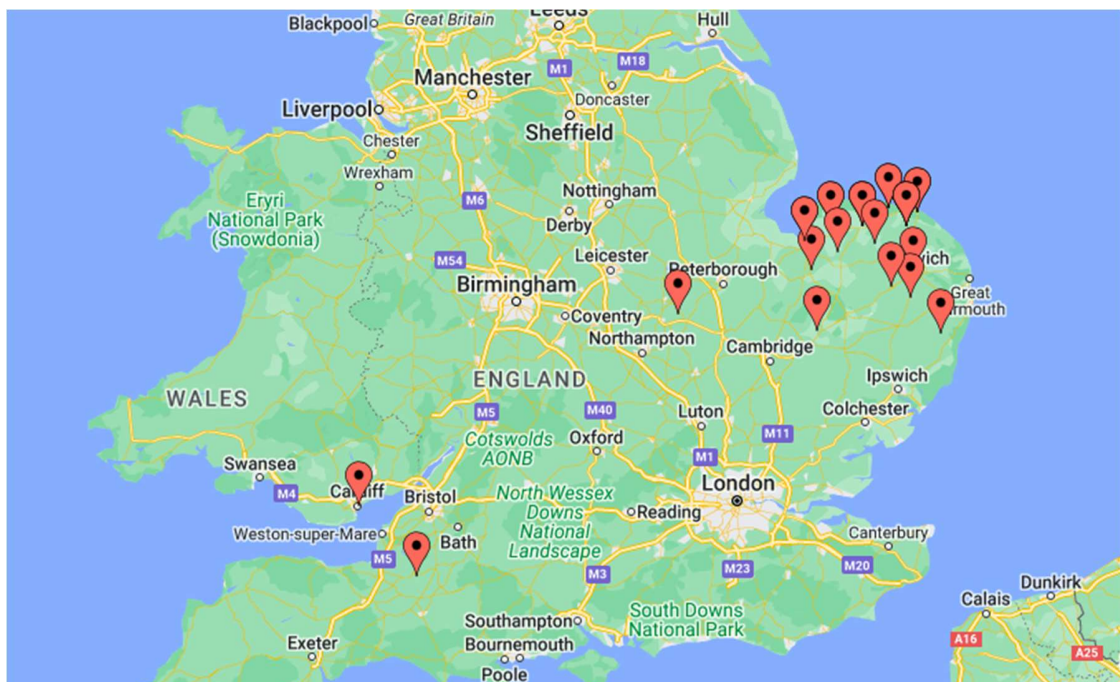
**The majority of people attending events stay for at least 2-3 hours and are local to King's Lynn. Most theatre audiences are also hyper-local or fairly local to the town. General visitors (for tours) comprise mainly tourists, with a few locals and stay for 30-60 minutes. We have limited information on exhibition audiences.**

- 58% of theatre audiences are local, coming from within a 10-mile radius of the Guildhall. A further 30% come from within a 10-20 mile radius. 18% come from within a 20-50 mile radius. The remaining 2% are from further away, ranging from Aberdeen to Southampton (see map below). This is based on data from ticket sales between 1 October 2023 – 30 September 2024 (8969 tickets).



Theatre Audience postcodes. Circles show 10, 20 and 50 mile radius of KL Guildhall.

- Core audiences for events tend to come from the immediate PE30 postcode area; smaller numbers come from further afield. For more niche topics, we know that they have attracted some audiences who have travelled specifically to attend an event or exhibition, sometimes up to one hour.
- For the Heads and Tails exhibition, most people came from West Norfolk or North Norfolk, although this was based on a very small sample.
- Tourists visiting King's Lynn are also attending Guildhall activities, although they make up a smaller proportion overall; we have recorded people coming from across the East of England, London and further away.  
*'Today was a fun family event. Well worth the 1 hour drive to visit.'* (Dragon Festival 2023)
- We know that guided tours tend to attract people who are not local to King's Lynn; roughly 90% of those providing feedback via the comments book were British or overseas tourists, often from Europe, Australia, New Zealand or North America.



Heads and Tails visitors – home postcodes

**People are attracted to the events because of their themes (e.g. dragons, Shakespeare), the child-friendly activities and entertainment on offer. Some people comment on the events being something free / affordable to support family time together.**

- Families tend to come to the event days, although these also attract older couples and older people who visit with friends (i.e. it offers a social outing). These are often made up of a core-group (e.g. parent/s and child/ren), of differing ages (pre-school, primary school and sometimes secondary school age). There are instances of inter-generational

family groups, and of wider family groups (e.g. aunts/uncles and cousins) or friendship groups (two or three families with children at the same school) coming together. At the Victorian Christmas 2023 event it was observed that this had also attracted a number of retired couples who were looking for something affordable to attend to 'get into the Christmas spirit'.

- We know that event days attract people for whom English is not their first language – we have heard a range of languages being spoken. Anecdotally, around a dozen people of Eastern European background have been attracted to each event; at the Dragon Festival in 2024, one parent spoke very limited English and relied on their child to translate for them but stayed for the entire afternoon – this speaks of the venue being welcoming, despite there being a language barrier (also see the point below).
- We have observed how the events offer an opportunity for socialising – for people who do not know each other to mix and strike up conversations over craft activities in a relaxed and friendly environment.

#### How do people find out about what is on offer?

- The events and activities generally are raising the profile of the venue. Facebook is the predominant way that people hear about what events are on offer, followed by 'Word of Mouth' and then posters/banners around King's Lynn. This is also supported by evidence from the March 2025 performance report from Destination Research which showed the average engagement reach for Facebook was 3.13%; this is deemed solid and above-industry average for non-paid content.
- For the Heads & Tails and Magic of Middle Earth exhibitions, people tended to find out via direct marketing from the organisers<sup>9</sup>, word of mouth, social media<sup>10</sup>, via posters in the town or by just coming upon the exhibition by chance.
- People are expressing an interest in coming along to other activities that are on offer as a result of coming to the venue:  
*'Next time I would do a heritage tour' and 'I'd love to do a tour of the building'*  
(Shakespeare Big Birthday Bash 2024)
- Instagram had an 8.39% engagement rate (March 2025 performance report from Destination Research) which is deemed excellent by most Marketing industry benchmarks.
- Data trends on website audiences (new vs repeat audiences) are currently being closely monitored to assess whether or not the venue is growing awareness.

#### How much are people prepared to pay and for what type of activity?

- People appreciate the range of themes / topics that are offered through these activities, including, for example, Shakespeare (e.g. Play in a Day aimed at families, and Shakespeare's Big Birthday Bash event), dragons (Dragon Festival event), Sci-Fi/Tolkien (Magic of Middle Earth Exhibition). These topics are often a draw for people to attend.

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<sup>9</sup> Heads & Tails

<sup>10</sup> Facebook for Magic of Middle Earth



*'[We are] fans of Shakespeare. [The] event look like good fun' and 'My daughter is very interested in Tudors, so I knew she would enjoy it' (Shakespeare Big Birthday Bash).*

*'There is something for every age group, which is great! We loved it 😊' (Magic of Middle Earth Exhibition)*

- People appreciate the mix of activities on offer that encourage social interaction and the opportunity to experience and try traditional pastimes (such as dancing, music, making peppermint creams, brass rubbing, theatrical performances, archery, axe throwing) and be hands-on (e.g. holding animals, crafting, games).
- For the Dragon Festival 2024 a charge of £2 per person was introduced, to test how the charge could be administered and whether or not people would be prepared to bear an entry cost having previously enjoyed these events without charge. The audience survey also asked a range of questions on this topic, including potential options for future pricing (e.g. a flat rate charge or concessionary prices for children).
  - The cost of attending the event was perceived to be very good value for money, some people perceived it as a “bargain”.
  - There was no clear preference in terms of a future pricing option, but generally speaking, people would be prepared to pay £3-£5 for children and £5 for adults. Suggested family ticket prices mostly ranged between a total of £5 and £20, although some suggested that a separate family ticket was unnecessary.
  - Dragon Festival 2024 was less busy than in 2023 (when it recorded roughly double the number of attendances, see figures on p. 5). This could possibly be attributed to the introduction of a charge, although could also have been caused by the change of day (from a Saturday to a Sunday) and a change in marketing (less publicity in 2024 with a reliance on the venue's own Facebook account which had not been open long and did not have a large following at the time).
  - At the Victorian Christmas 2023 event, conversations also took place with several families about cost and these demonstrated that some families (including pensioners) are priced out of taking part in Christmas events locally; the fact that the St George's event was free had made it accessible for them.
- Just under one third of Heads & Tails survey respondents said that they would like cafe facilities. Some comments were also that people would like the opening hours of the Fermoy Gallery to be extended. A 'decent' food & drink offer is something that families often cited as a requirement at events.
- When surveyed at events, audiences consistently tended to choose family activity sessions, family theatre shows and themed event days as options that they would most be interested in attending in future. This is shown below (green highlights):

	<b>Dragon Festival 2023</b>	<b>Victorian Christmas 2023</b>	<b>Shakespeare BBB 2024</b>
Family activity sessions	75.6%	84.0%	70.0%
Family theatre shows	59.0%	60.0%	70.0%

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Drama club	21.8%	38.0%	28.3%
Heritage tour	29.5%	36.0%	38.3%
Exhibition	23.1%	32.0%	38.3%
Themed events days	64.1%	52.0%	66.7%
Total number in sample	78	50	60

*What future events would you be interested in attending at St George's Guildhall?* Percentages do not round to 100% as respondents could chose more than one option.

### Feedback to Guided Tours

There are 982 comments recorded in the visitor comments book between 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022 and 15<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

This is a large volume of comments that are presented in written (not digital format). They have been assessed to give an overall sense of what kind of experience respondents reported having. Comments relate to:

- The guided tour itself
- The building
- The volunteer guides

980 comments are positive

1 comment is negative

1 comment makes a recommendation

#### Methodology

Every comment was read through and broad patterns in the data were noted. Comments that illustrate a common theme in the feedback are presented below as examples. These represent around 5% of all the comments received.

It should be noted that it is not known how visitors came to write in the comments book; whether everyone was requested to provide a comment, if some guides were more proactive than others, if visitors who responded positively to the tours were encouraged to complete the comments book. Nevertheless, the comments do provide an interesting insight into what people value most about the guided tours<sup>11</sup>. This can be personalized as follows:

**People value the volunteers for their enthusiasm, breadth of knowledge and warm welcome. Many volunteers are mentioned and thanked by name. The time and care taken by volunteers adds greatly to the visitor experience. It is mentioned time and time again throughout the hundreds of comments.**

Thank you for your hospitality and sharing your love of this theatre.

Excellent presentation of the history of the hall by [your volunteer]. Good luck for the future.

Excellent because of [the two volunteers who] made history come alive!

Very impressed with volunteers talk on the history of this amazing building.

Fascinating building that offers layers of history. [Your volunteer] is extremely informative.

Informative guide made building come alive!

Fascinating tour with [your volunteer]. Learned so much we even forgot about lunch!

Excellent tour. Discovered so much history. Thank you so so much for your time!

Fantastic tour. The lady brought it alive. What a gem- we nearly walked by!

Remarkable survival – extraordinary tour, welcomed by very well-informed people, was so warm. Thank you.

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<sup>11</sup> Many comments are also very compelling and could make effective source material for publicity/marketing about the venue.

A most interesting talk and such good knowledge.  
Fascinating talk especially the 'gory' bits – bedtime story for grandson!  
Fantastic visit and engagement. Amazing building and even more amazing staff (comment left by Norfolk Police).

**The tours themselves are engaging, informative and interesting. People learn new information, whatever their historical knowledge. This suggests that volunteers are able to pitch their tours to different levels depending on their audience.**

A very pretty place, nice staff, lovely rooms WAS NOT BORED for a second.  
Splendid. Kept me/us enthralled and entertained. Shakespeare would have been demanding a signature.

We learned so much about KL history.

Thank you, [name removed] – so interesting and entertaining, I'm into history but still learned new things – brilliant.

What a jewel of a surprise! We've learned so much. Thank you.

Fabulous tour given by [your volunteer]. Learned so much. Thank you.

**The tours are seen to be high quality. People appreciate having a personalised tour. They say that they will recommend them to others.**

Utterly spoilt with a very informative personal tour – brilliant! Thank you.

STUNNING! One of the best tours we have ever done.

Amazing history and sense of place. Great to be shown round personally.

Wonderful visit. Great explanations. Must see in the area!

Impressive Guildhall with a wonderful tour, would recommend it to anyone.

Just wow!

The best most informative tour in King's Lynn. Thank you.

**The Guildhall is mentioned very favourably for its historical importance and is seen as key heritage asset for Kings Lynn. A word that is often used to describe it is 'gem'.**

What a historical gem in the middle of Kings Lynn – so wonderful to hear about its history.  
Thank you.

We have had the most interesting visit. Lovely Guildhall – preserve it forever.

So glad this beautiful and historic space has been preserved and is still loved and cared for.

Inspiring. A real look back. Gorgeous roof. Many thanks.

What a gift this building is to the town with all its stories. Thank you for showing us round and all good wishes for the future.

Amazing building with so much history and told by enthusiastic and knowledgeable people.  
Thanks.

Thank you for the tour guide. We really enjoyed it and the history and culture of King's Lynn.

To quote Shakespeare 'all the world's a stage' and what a fabulous one we have here!

Incredible place with loads of history!!

So pleased to have been able to see this place, and so pleased it survived! Thank you [volunteer] for our tour.

Love the convincing Shakespeare connection, a wonderful and illuminating theatre.

**People often express surprise at what the venue has to offer. The comments hint at a suggestion that it surpasses their expectations, as if they had not known or appreciated what was behind the exterior of the Guildhall.**

Very unexpected but brilliant. Loved hearing the history.

Thank you so much, what a huge revelation! We've lived here for a decade and never knew about such fascinating history Kings Lynn held. Fabulous!

Fascinating. Much more than I expected.

**The tours are likely to bring in repeat audiences. There are instances where people say that they will return, for another visit or for a theatre performance.**

Valuable building and wonderful talk we look forward to returning.

So beautiful and so interesting – must come for a performance.

A few hours is not enough to even get started. I'll be back.

What a wonderful place. I could feel the history and we'll come back for a performance.

Fantastic guide. Outstanding wealth of information. Inspirational. We'll come for a play 😊

**People are pleased that the building and its history are being made accessible to the public and that there are plans to continue to do so.**

Amazing historical tour. Hope the regeneration work preserves the spirit of this lovely place.

Wonderful theatre may it long live and be part of our heritage!

Thank you very much for a fascinating tour. We were not aware of what we would see; a spectacular room. Thanks again.

Looking forward to its restoration.

A peep into the past with more to look forward to. Thank you.

Fantastic tour and history. Keep this building safe for prosperity [?posterity]!

Very interesting talk. Sets your imagination alive. Thanks for keeping this wonderful building.

So interesting, long may its history continue to be told.

History. Politics. Theatre. A historical floor. LOVE.

A fascinating tour. Looking forward to the refurbishment. Thanks.

**There was one comment suggesting an improvement (this will happen within the redevelopment plans):**

Please reopen the cellar cafe. This would be a huge asset to the Guildhall. I used to visit before it closed for COVID and would love to take my family and our guests from our local business.

**There was one negative comment:**

Site looking scruffy! Where is the leaflet about the Fermoy / Shakespeare Galleries??

## 4. Education Programme

The education offer has been developed from scratch by the Learning and Education Officer with the support of a small team of volunteers and part-time support from a member of NMS staff (two days a week). The post has been funded by Norfolk and Norwich Festival Bridge, UK Shared Prosperity Fund and BCKLWN. In 2024 this work has continued to build audiences with schools, Home Educators and families during school holidays. Activity days are also offered at weekends and during school holidays. Workshops include Dragon Arts Club (Saturdays), Play in a Day and other hands-on activities.

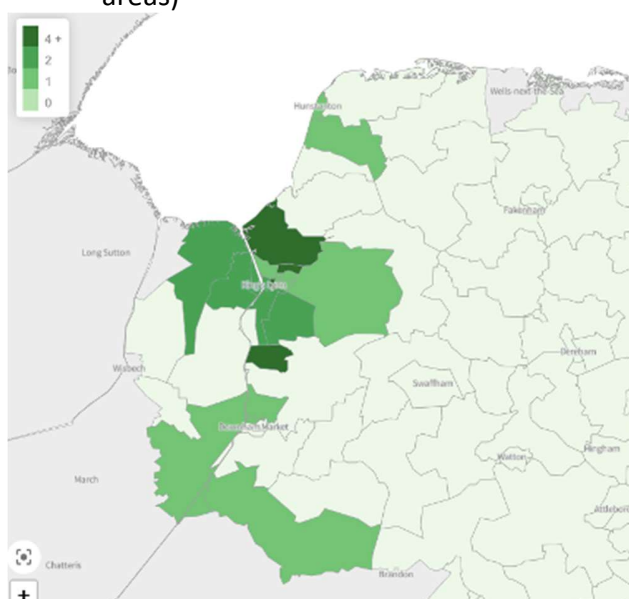
Schools that have taken part in the programme have average percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals of 22.5% (range 7.5% - 48.8%). This is above the East of England average of 19.4%, but below the national average of 24.6%.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTALS
2023								204	19	75	773	836	1907
2024	110	362	549	281	1248	359	541	82	120	357	156	758	4923
2025	246												246

Between August 2023 and January 2025, a total of 7076 people (5284 children and 1792 adults) took part in school visits and family learning sessions, not including outreach.

### What do we know about current audiences?

- Education audiences on average comprise a quarter who are new to the venue.
- Family session ratings range between 4.31 and 5.00.
- Family learning participants mostly come from the local area (see map below, green areas)





### What motivates schools/people to come?

- Children enjoy the activities at the family sessions, Dragon Arts Club and Play in a Day.
- The venue appeals to Schools and Home Educators alike.
  - Across 2024, there were a total of 4,923 attendances at the Guildhall for learning/education, of which schools/Home Education comprised 1,650 attendances.
  - In the Spring 2024 term for example, the Guildhall welcomed 276 formal learning visits, of which 211 were made by school pupils from 8 schools, from Reception to Year 8. It offered 5 school holiday activities (Easter and May half term).
  - We know that the venue primarily engages schools in King's Lynn and West Norfolk, including small schools and schools with a higher than regional average proportion of children in receipt of Free School Meals<sup>12</sup>, such as Greenpark Academy and Tilney All Saints Primary. The latter had 84 pupils on roll in January 2024.
  - Home Educators come for both specific workshops that are provided for them, as well as event days (i.e. there is a cross-over and therefore opportunity for deeper engagement). We also know that some children also attend activities such as Dragon Arts Club and special event days, or that there are children who are involved with the Guildhall through partners such as Kings Lynn Young Players and their schools (e.g. St Martha's Primary).
  - Audiences with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) are included. Of the 276 visits quoted above, 19 were made by children with SEND, and we know that they are attending larger events too:

*'One mother who was visiting with her teenage autistic daughter and her daughter's friend said that the event was good because it was not too busy or overwhelming for her daughter. She had been attracted to the event by the offer of a trail and was interested in doing the town-wide trail.'*

### How much are people prepared to pay and for what type of activity?

- School sessions currently cost £3 per child (adults are free). Holiday sessions are £2 per child (adults are free). Shakespeare Week activities and Art Workshops are free.
- Teachers feel the activities offer good value and are keen to return and repeat them in future.
- People say that the activity days offer a-value-for-money family experience (37% said they would be happy to pay more).

*'It was a nice way to spend the afternoon with the kids that was affordable. Very well organised, family friendly, fun, great atmosphere and selection of events. Fantastic and great value for money. (Dragon Festival)'*

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<sup>12</sup> Half of all schools visiting between January 2024 and February 2025 had a higher than regional average proportion of children in receipt of Free School Meals (19.4%).

**What aspects of Shakespeare's life/work can be built into each learning event/learning audience?**

**What do audiences know and/or expect of the building before they first visit (including the building's links to Shakespeare)?**

- The learning programme currently includes the following aspects of Shakespeare's life/work:
  - That Shakespeare was a writer
  - That Shakespeare had links with the Guildhall
  - That a murder at the Guildhall inspired Shakespeare
  - The characters in some of Shakespeare's plays
  - Shakespearian language
- Schools activities are well structured, well-organised, have good resources and are well pitched to the ages and abilities of the children taking part, with scope for differentiation for SEND children and more able children (i.e. activities can be made easier or more challenging as needed).
- Activities meet the needs of the curriculum in English literature (Shakespeare), Literacy and oracy, Drama, Local history, Art. Many children had never been inside a theatre or gallery before. The learning activities give them opportunities to explore and learn in those spaces; something which cannot be achieved in the classroom.
- Children have learnt about:
  - Shakespeare and his work; new vocabulary and gained a better understanding of Shakespearean language. They have gained confidence to speak on stage, with good eye contact and projection. They have learnt about storytelling, adapting a story to the stage and telling stories using puppets.
  - The Guildhall, its hidden structures (the underground tunnels and backstage areas) and its links with Shakespeare. This has inspired greater pride in the town.
  - Theatres, including the various elements of a production like backstage and technical roles.
- Children enjoyed the experience and were inspired by their visit.
- As well as having an enjoyable time, people are learning new information or developing skills in informal ways, e.g. from performing arts, through facilitated crafts, from costumed characters, and in more formal ways through schools sessions.
- In September 2024, a guided tour volunteer noted that the Learning & Engagement Officer postholder has introduced activities such as Play in a Day and education visits which has really changed St George's Guildhall for the better. They commented that *"Kids are the future and hearing the sounds of children in the building is great and this area should be developed further. There has been a new energy in the venue with these events and since the Learning & Engagement postholder joined"*. Around a dozen other volunteers present at the time nodded in agreement at this observation.

- Awareness of Shakespeare amongst young people can vary depending on the specific audience (please see further information below under Section 4).

**What other curriculum areas / topics would be useful for enrichment?**

- Schools welcome enrichment activities in the curriculum areas of English, History, Drama / Performance skills, Music and Art, and also performance opportunities so children can share their learning with their families.

**What are the barriers to participation? (e.g. travel, cost, curriculum constraints) and what might help to overcome these barriers?**

- Cost of transport is the biggest barrier according to teachers surveyed.
- Cost of the visit itself and timetable / curriculum constraints are also barriers.
- For neurodivergent children, breakout spaces and / or noise cancelling headphones would be helpful to overcome sensory overload.

## 5. Community engagement with key audiences

To date, conversations with key audiences have included:

- the public engagement event during RIBA Stage 3 on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 2024, hosted in the Shakespeare Barn (organised by BCKLWN with Haworth Tompkins)
- a meeting in September 2024 with 14 Guildhall volunteers organised by one of the report authors and attended by the Guildhall's Learning & Engagement Officer
- conversations with/for young audiences including the Assistant Producer for Collusion, King's Lynn Young Players, tours for two groups from the VENI Project<sup>13</sup> (College of West Anglia students) and The Beacon's Pizza Project in North Lynn<sup>14</sup>. For the latter, a group of six young people attended a tour of the Guildhall in January 2025 to find out about the venue and the wider group then welcomed one of the report authors to their weekly get-together at The Beacon.
- conversations with the community as part of outreach activities for Shakespeare Week, delivered by the Guildhall's Learning & Engagement Officer in Norfolk Libraries (March 2025).

Other conversations have also taken place with representatives of Art Reach (regarding the King's Lynn Cultural and Heritage Strategy), and Xen Arts (a local arts organisation). Early conversations have started with audiences during outreach sessions being delivered by the Guildhall's Learning & Engagement Officer in Norfolk Libraries but these are still in their infancy. In the recommendations, we advise that further audience engagement takes place with specific groups, particularly in the community, while the Guildhall is closed.

Activity	Adults	Young People	Total
Public Engagement Event, May 2024	45		45
Guildhall Volunteers, September 2024	14		14
Collusion, September 2024	1		1
King's Lynn Young Players, October 2024	1	18	19
The Beacon's Pizza Project, January 2025	2	24	26
VENI Project, February 2025	2	15	17
VENI Project, March 2025	2	16	18

<sup>13</sup> [VENI Skills Academy – VENI Skillful – Towards a Skills Academy for the Visitor Economy in the East of England](#)

<sup>14</sup> Information about The Beacon and Pizza Project is available here:

[North Lynn Youth Group credited with reduction in local crime - BBC News](#)

[Agenda item - Joint Presentation from Ben Griffin, PC Chloe Geary and PC Patryck Polom on NCC Targeted Youth Support Services](#)

These conversations indicate that:

- People are generally in support of the project. They feel the venue is an important asset for the town and should be used for the community.
- Some of the potential barriers for using the venue in the future are perceived as financial (affordability) and transport (getting there).
- Going out into the community is reaching new audiences for the Guildhall, and reaching those who have not engaged recently with the venue, or who may have previously only engaged for very specific reasons (e.g. to visit the café which has been closed for some time).
- Young people tend to be viewed as a homogenous group, but there are still disparities in experience, opinion and opportunities. We saw this on the topic of Shakespeare, where King's Lynn Young Players, and those from North Lynn at Key Stage 3/4 tended to be more aware of Shakespeare than those of Key Stage 2 age from North Lynn. North Lynn young people in general were likely to say that they were aware of St George's Guildhall but much less likely to have visited. If they had visited, this was not with their families but with their schools. Downham Market families (Shakespeare Week, March 2025) were also much less aware of Shakespeare and had not visited the Guildhall before.
- A promising relationship between The Beacon's Pizza Project and the Guildhall is underway. There are firm plans for the Learning & Engagement Officer to deliver 'Theatre in a Day' sessions within the North Lynn community to young people.
- There is information resulting from these conversations that could usefully shape decisions about the interpretation strategy for the Guildhall. They have been shared already with members of the project team.



Kings Lynn Young Players on stage





Kings Lynn Young Players talking about the changes they would like to see in the venue

### **What do volunteers value about working at the Guildhall? What would improve their experience?**

- Volunteers enjoy the experience of working in the Guildhall, of being able to share its rich history (both of the building's fabric and important place in local heritage). Several members volunteer across different venues in the town, are passionate and very knowledgeable about King's Lynn and the Guildhall. Volunteering offers a sense of having achieved something. Positive feedback from visitors makes them feel that they are "keeping the building alive" and "gives you a buzz". History is "oozing out of its walls". The Guildhall is a "wreck with a big heart" where the history has not been sanitised, like it has in other places and this adds to the charm of the place. It would be a loss to change this. The respect that the volunteers have for the building and its history is mirrored in the comments provided by visitors who have been on guided tours.
- A strong sense of pride in the town's history/heritage and a strong sense of goodwill towards St George's Guildhall goes a long way in retaining volunteers. When asked, there was not an overwhelming positive response about incentives to continue volunteering; more important was the need for clear, consistent and regular communication between BCKLWN and volunteers, and for volunteers to feel that their contribution was valued by the council. Getting the 'right person' as a volunteer coordinator in place is really important. There have been links with BCKLWN staff in the past in terms of volunteer coordination and this experience has been variable.



- In terms of promotion and marketing, volunteers felt that the Discover Kings Lynn leaflet is really good, it is simple but effective. The Stories of Lynn App is promoted by some volunteers but not everyone.

### **What would attract more numbers and a more diverse range of people to volunteer at the venue?**

- One volunteer mentioned having joined fairly recently in response to a Facebook advert. They still work and volunteer – volunteering shouldn't be aimed just at people who are retired, it is important to have a diverse mix of people volunteering. Offering flexibility in volunteering (e.g. ad hoc dates) will appeal to people who cannot commit to a regular slot, perhaps because they are working still or have other commitments.
- There are not enough volunteers generally in Kings Lynn, although it was pointed out that the town does better in this regard than some other towns
- Youth volunteering opportunities are not well catered for. Historically there have been barriers associated with age – one volunteer talked about their grandson wanting to volunteer at a venue from the age of 14 but the Council policy at that time was that volunteering was only open to those aged 18 and over. They had been enthusiastic and keen to promote youth volunteering but this opportunity had been lost. Another volunteer present had started volunteering at the age of 16 and was still volunteering at various venues.

### **What kinds of skills do volunteers have, what kinds would they like to develop?**

- Some of the education volunteers mentioned having worked in education before (former teachers). Another volunteer mentioned a background in engineering.
- Volunteers come from all walks of life and therefore have different experiences and skills to offer. They are a valuable resources for BCKLWN but there is a sense that volunteers may be perceived as a homogeneous group and instead could be recognised for the valuable range of skills and experience that they bring.

Volunteers have helped to keep St George's Guildhall open. For 50 weeks of the year, six days a week, a reliable team of volunteers were available to offer tours of the building. These volunteers are still offering some interpretation now that the core part of the venue is shut to enable archaeology work to be undertaken. There are also volunteers who have provided stewarding duties for performances and others who support events and learning activities. Collectively in 2024, these volunteers contributed at least 4,680 hours of their time to the Guildhall, equating to an investment of £53,539.20<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> These figures are likely to be an underestimate. There are also volunteers who support performances in other roles (e.g. costume, props, scenery, backstage crew) but whose time has not been quantified. The financial equivalent has been calculated using the 2024 National Minimum Wage which was £11.44. This provides a rudimentary guide, but there are more nuanced models that advise undertaking a volunteer audit and assigning different values based on the specific volunteer roles.

## 6. Summary

What have we learned about St George's Guildhall through this review and evaluation process?

1. Audience engagement with the venue has grown considerably over the last two years, rising from a total of 20,246 visits or interactions in 2023 to 28,928 visits or interactions in 2024. This equates to an increase of 42.9%. Growth has been noticeable across all strands of activity; general visits, theatre audiences, exhibitions, formal and informal learning and the outreach offer.
2. The events and activities programme which has largely been created from scratch over the last 24 months is attracting new audiences as well as building a loyal following amongst mainly family groups. People deem these events to be good quality with a range of activities on offer. These events, and other learning activities, are often supported by a small team of education volunteers and freelance practitioners.
3. Audiences for events and theatre performances tend to be fairly local to King's Lynn. Events do attract multi-generational family groups and families with members where English is not their first language.
4. Guided tours, delivered by a dedicated team of volunteers, tend to attract mainly tourists, from both Britain and overseas. They value this experience because of the volunteers' breadth of knowledge, warm welcome and often personal approach.
5. Guildhall volunteers have contributed at least 4,680 hours in time equivalent to £53,539.20 investment in the Guildhall in 2024. They have helped to facilitate the delivery of these key activities.
6. We have a more limited understanding of exhibition audiences because of a gap in data collected for this audience type. The available information suggests that they may attract a more niche audience and that the particular audience type may shift depending on the topic or focus of the exhibition.
7. A mixed marketing strategy is needed to publicise what the Guildhall has to offer, depending on the type of activity and the audience it relates to. Publicising family events by Facebook is successful, whereas for exhibitions a range of methods seemed to land better, e.g. direct mailing, posters and social media. Word of mouth was often mentioned; therefore building and maintaining a reputation for delivering a high-quality visitor experience should not be underestimated.
8. People value St George's Guildhall as a 'historic gem' within the town. People are generally supportive of the project to redevelop and refurbish the venue provided this is done sympathetically.
9. People would welcome the return of café facilities to the venue.

10. People are prepared to pay between £3-5 per child and £5 per adult for family-based activities, although introducing a cost could present a barrier for some people who are struggling particularly with the cost of living. The most popular choices for this audience were family activity sessions, family theatre shows and themed event days.
11. Education audiences have been built over a relatively short period of time and include schools, Home Educated groups and families offering term-time and school holiday sessions. School audiences between August 2023 and January 2025 recorded 7050 visits overall (5258 children and 1792 adults). Schools attending the Guildhall have average percentage of children eligible for free school meals of 22.5%. This is higher than the regional (East of England) average of 19.4% suggesting that the venue is serving schools with children from a mix of backgrounds. Around a quarter of all education visitors report being new to St George's Guildhall.
12. Feedback received from teachers has provided some insight into how well activities meet the needs of their pupils and of the curriculum, but feedback was only received from 14 teachers. It is recommended to obtain feedback from group leaders for every school visit to enable ongoing quality monitoring as well as addressing any matters arising.
13. Although based on a limited number of responses, it appears that the education programme is addressing all of the curriculum needs requested by schools, i.e. Drama, History, English and Art. The greatest barrier to schools taking part is the cost of transport.
14. From early conversations with a small number of groups, there are further opportunities to develop audiences, particularly amongst those groups of people who may be local to Kings Lynn and know about St George's Guildhall but who have not visited before or have not visited for a long time, or who may not be aware of the venue at all. This is covered in more detail under Recommendations below.

## 7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made considering the key questions and evidence that have been explored in this report.

Topic	Comments
<p><b>Potential audiences</b></p> <p>Which questions are not fully answered yet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the current barriers for non-users?</li> <li>• What do audiences know and/or expect of the building before they first visit? [this question is less pertinent now that building works have commenced]</li> <li>• What are the non-physical access needs of potential audiences?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some barriers have been explored for a small group of young people living in North Lynn, and conversations have begun with audiences as part of outreach work being delivered by the Learning and Engagement Officer</li> <li>• This audience engagement and the associated conversations need to continue in order to fully answer these questions and to build relationships with a wide range of people in the town, focusing especially on new audiences.</li> <li>• Any continuing evaluation activity should not focus solely on events that are being delivered in those areas of the Guildhall that are to remain open in the short term. This is likely to yield data that repeats that which is already presented in this report.</li> <li>• It would also be advisable, with the support of BCKLWN, to host a simple online discussion / poll with local residents, to understand the kinds of outreach activities that people would welcome during the closure period.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theatre goers</b></p> <p>Which questions are not fully answered yet?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do current audiences value about the current offer? What would improve it?</li> <li>• What are people prepared to pay for performances?</li> <li>• How can the venue attract audiences from further away that are already receptive to arts/culture/heritage?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans to survey theatre audiences in 2024 were not possible because of technical reasons.</li> <li>• A new mailing list has been created and may provide a useful way in which to survey audiences about some of these topics nearer to the reopening of the venue.</li> <li>• It would be advisable to test some of the statements set out in the Business Plan relating to the availability of 'heritage receptive' audiences with higher disposable incomes within the wider Kings Lynn area. It would also be helpful to understand: What offer in particular would attract this</li> </ul>

	audience type? Where specifically do they live and how do they like to receive communications?
<b>Learning</b> Which questions are not fully answered yet? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What other curriculum areas / topics would be useful for enrichment?</li> <li>What are the barriers to participation (e.g. travel, cost, curriculum constraints) and what might help to overcome these barriers?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In Spring/Summer 2024, surveys for schools were set up to help answer these questions. They were only recently sent out.</li> <li>Five responses were received from schools. Responses have yet to be received from Home Educators and Pre-School settings. It would be advisable to keep the collection period open for these surveys (with reminders being sent) and to review any results again at the end of the academic year.</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b> Which questions are not fully answered yet? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What kinds of co-production and co-creation would local groups/organisations be interested in pursuing with the venue?</li> <li>What opportunities are there for working in partnership with other cultural venues in Kings Lynn?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audience engagement during the closure period would enable these questions to be explored. It is important to maintain relationships with organisations who were previously using the Guildhall (e.g. Collusion, KLODs, Kings Lynn Players).</li> <li>There are opportunities to build relationships with organisations such as The Beacon and to work in partnership with NCC's Targeted Youth Support Service.</li> </ul>
<b>Making use of data and information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is not easy to extract quantitative data across all strands of activity. This presents challenges to share data in a way that enables incisive decision-making within the team. It is recommended that a review of data collection systems are undertaken before the building reopens to streamline this process.</li> <li>Data could be put to better use to inform decisions, and <u>advocate at all levels</u>. For example, it is recommended that the feedback provided in the volunteer guided tour comments book could be used as publicity and marketing material. The financial equivalent of the volunteer contribution could be communicated (i) to volunteers (as a means of recognising their contribution), (ii) within the Borough</li> </ul>

	Council to demonstrate the monetary value of this, and (iii) to the general public as part of a wider strategy to encourage volunteering.
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