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horizon

Ashford Arts Centre

Operator Opportunity Prospectus

August 2026

 **Ashford**
Borough Council



ODEON

F.G. MINTER

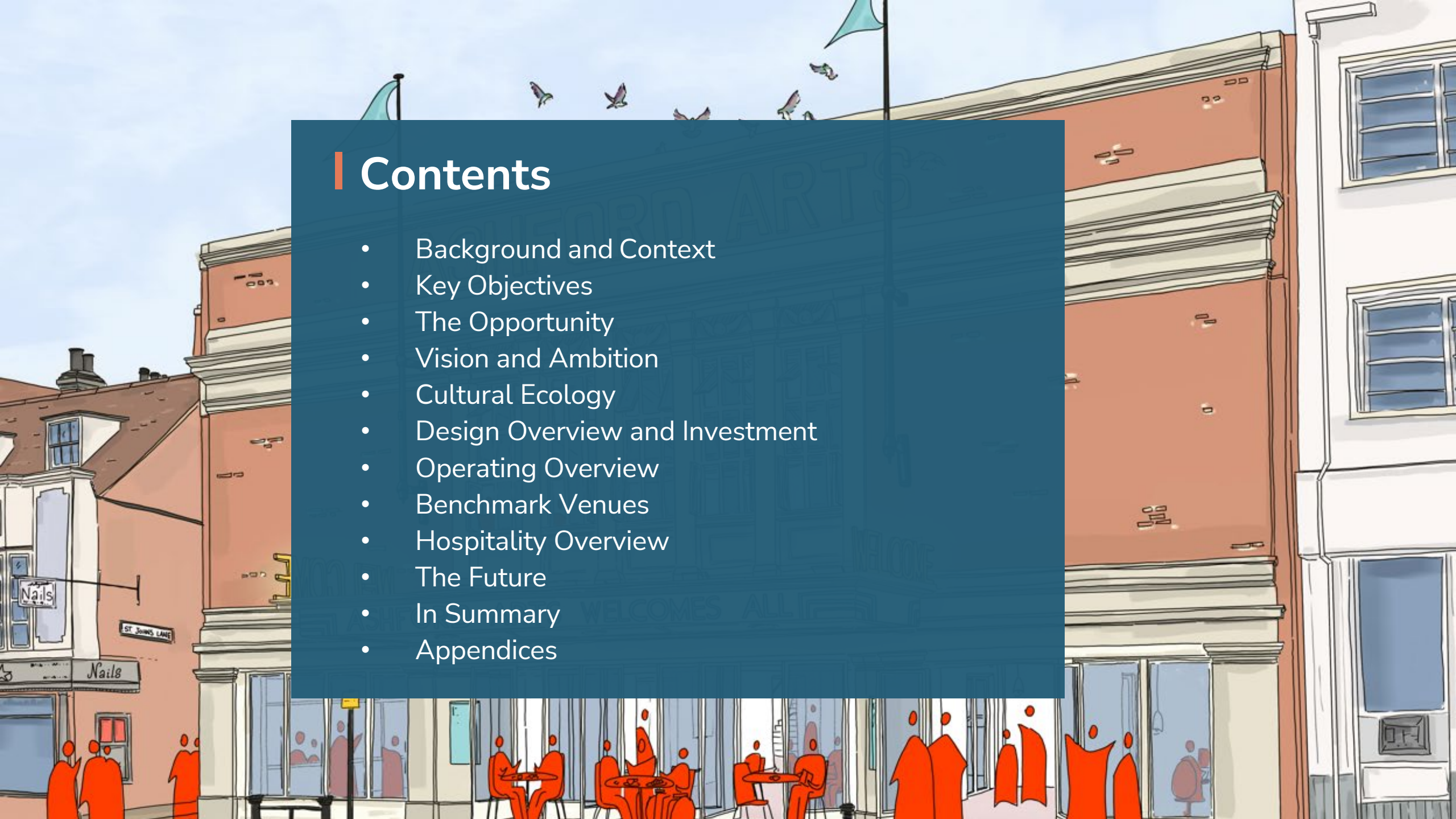
ODEON

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MONDAY 30th AUGUST

ODEON THE THEATRE WITH
A DIFFERENCE
A PLACE TO ENJOYMENT
BECOME A PATRON
WOLF STREET
IN LUXURY

THEATRE
14

The background is a colorful illustration of a city street. On the left, there's a building with a sign that says 'Nails' and a street sign for 'ST. JAMES LANE'. In the foreground, several stylized orange figures are walking or sitting at outdoor tables. The sky is blue with a few birds flying. A large blue semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the table of contents.

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| Background and Context - Ashford

- The former Odeon / Mecca Bingo building is an iconic landmark in the heart of Ashford Town Centre.
- Ashford Borough Council is now progressing the refurbishment of the front section of the former Odeon building to create a 2-floor cultural centre (approximately 944 sqm).
- The proposal includes a flexible performance space (audience capacity up to 176 seated, or 212 standing), a community events space within the former ballroom, a café/bar, and a small gallery/community workshop space.
- The Council is seeking to commission the next stage of detailed design through an architectural brief and to identify and appoint an operator for the new centre.
- BHV will support the Council in identifying viable operating models and partners that can optimise the commercial resilience of this new venue while safeguarding the social value and cultural impact this new venue has the opportunity to provide.

The background of the slide is a colorful illustration of a town street. On the left, there's a building with a sign that says 'Nails' and a street sign that says 'ST JOHN'. In the foreground, several stylized figures in red are walking or sitting at tables. On the right, there's a building with large windows. In the background, there are more buildings, a flagpole with a green flag, and several birds flying in the sky.

| Background and Context - Ashford

- Ashford is a historic Kent market town whose growth accelerated in the 19th century as a major railway hub. Over the past two decades it has been one of the South East's principal growth and regeneration locations, supported by significant housing, commercial and infrastructure investment.
- Ashford benefits from exceptional connectivity via Ashford International Station, with High Speed 1 services reaching London St Pancras in around 38 minutes, and direct links to Canterbury, Maidstone, Hastings and the wider South East.
- The town is strategically located on the M20 corridor, providing access to the Channel Tunnel, Dover and the national motorway network.
- Ashford Borough has a population of approximately 140,900, with the town itself around 85,000–90,000 residents. It is one of Kent's fastest-growing areas, characterised by a relatively young, family-oriented population, significant new housing growth and an expanding professional and commuter workforce.

Key Objectives



| Key Objectives

- To achieve a balanced and measured commercial & cultural partnership.
- Complementary to cultural ecosystem.
- Significant boost to the daytime and nighttime economy.
- Clear space utilisation strategy to meet social, cultural and financial demands.
- A cultural hub that becomes a community destination meeting a diverse range of social needs.
- Overall town-wide economic impact and social value benefits.

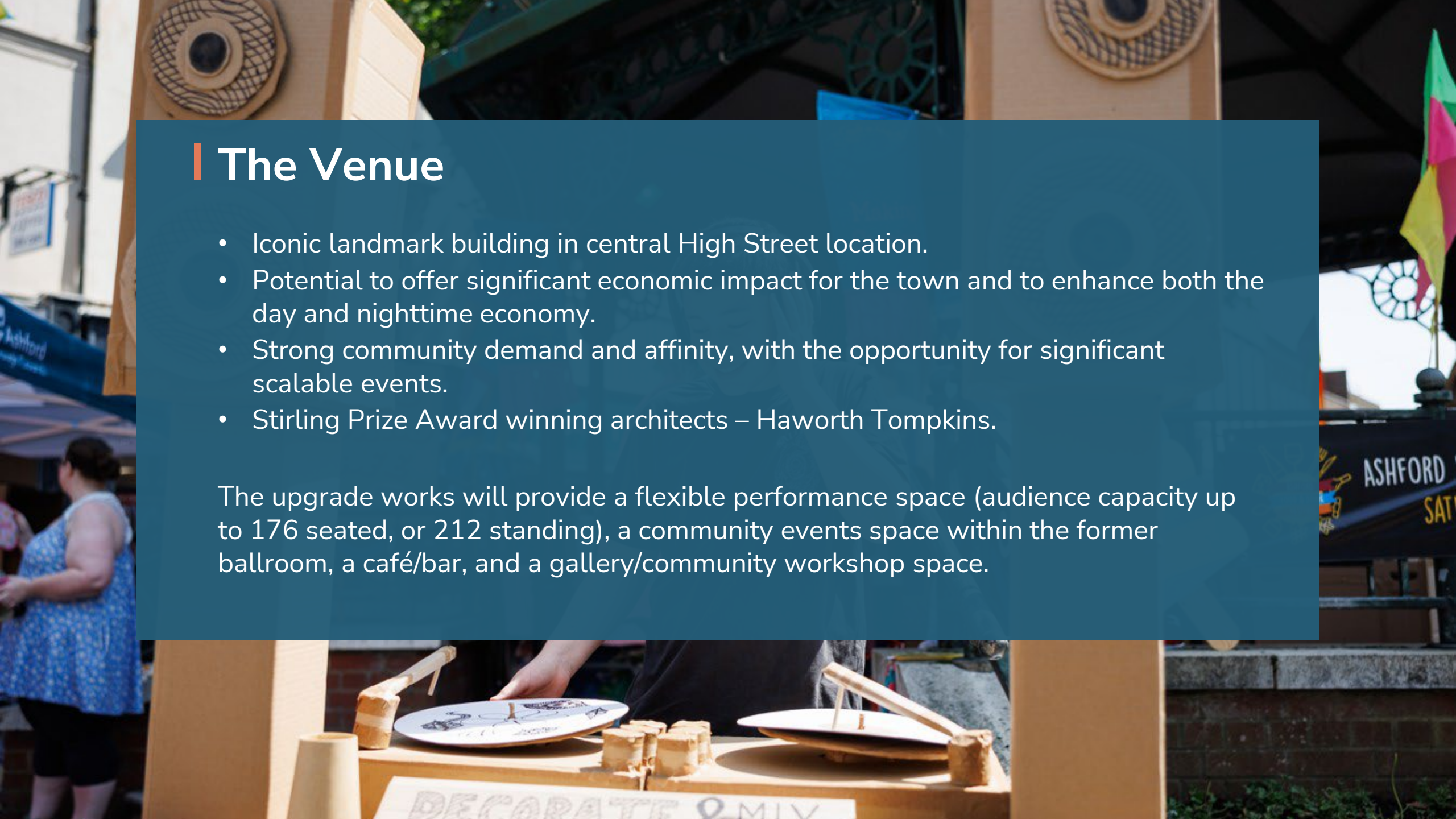
The Opportunity



| The Venue

- Iconic landmark building in central High Street location.
- Potential to offer significant economic impact for the town and to enhance both the day and nighttime economy.
- Strong community demand and affinity, with the opportunity for significant scalable events.
- Stirling Prize Award winning architects – Haworth Tompkins.

The upgrade works will provide a flexible performance space (audience capacity up to 176 seated, or 212 standing), a community events space within the former ballroom, a café/bar, and a gallery/community workshop space.



| Audience Profile

- **Ashford Borough population:** approximately **140,900** (Source: 2023 & 2024 MYPE), making it one of Kent's significant growth boroughs.
- Ashford's population is forecast to increase by +10% between 2022 and 2032 which outstrips regional growth in the South East and nationally.
- Ashford town itself has a population of approximately **80,000–90,000** residents. And over 120,000 residents live within a 15-minute drive of the Ashford Odeon.
- Extended to a 30-minute drive, an estimated 452,000 people live within reach of the Ashford Odeon including in towns such as Faversham, Maidstone and Dover.
- Approximately 1.2–1.5 million people live within a 60-minute drive time, creating a substantial regional catchment and audience potential.

| Audience Profile

Age Profile

- Relatively young compared with many Kent districts. Approximately:
19% aged 0–15
62% aged 16–64
19% aged 65+
- Strong family demographic driven by significant housing growth.

Economic Profile

High levels of employment with many residents commuting to London and wider Kent. Major employment sectors include: professional and business services, logistics and distribution, health and social care, education, retail and hospitality, and a growing creative and digital economy.

Ethnicity

Around 85% White British, with increasing diversity. Largest minority communities include Asian, mixed heritage, Black and European populations. More diverse than some neighbouring East Kent districts.



| Education

- Ashford has a **strong and diverse education offer**, supporting its position as one of Kent's fastest-growing towns and an attractive location for families.
- Ashford has **53 'good' and 'outstanding' primary and secondary schools**, including two independent schools, and two Grammar schools.
- Ashford College is a major provider of further education, apprenticeships, technical qualifications and employer-led skills programmes, with strengths in construction, engineering, business, digital and health sectors – with plans to expand its site.
- Ashford also benefits from strong connections to nearby institutions including Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Kent and University for the Creative Arts.
- Education provision is increasingly aligned to local growth sectors, including logistics, advanced manufacturing, health, digital industries and the creative economy.

| Tourism

Ashford sits at the heart of **Kent's visitor economy**, benefiting from its strategic position between London, Canterbury, Folkestone and the Kent coast. Ashford acts as a gateway and increasingly as a short-break, events and cultural destination.

Ashford Borough

- **Visitor economy value:** estimated at **£300–£350 million per annum**.
- **Annual visitors:** approximately **4–5 million day and overnight visits** combined.
- **Employment:** tourism supports an estimated **4,000–5,000 jobs** across hospitality, retail, leisure and visitor services.

Wider East Kent Region (Ashford, Canterbury, Folkestone & Hythe, Dover and Thanet)

- East Kent has one of the UK's largest regional visitor economies.
- **Annual visitors:** approximately **25–30 million visits**.
- **Visitor economy value:** approximately **£2.5–£3 billion annually**.
- **Employment supported:** around **45,000–55,000 jobs**.
- **Domestic visitors account for over 85%** of all trips.
- International tourism is growing, particularly from European markets.

| Cultural Participation

- According to Arts Council data, cultural engagement in Ashford is high.
- 93.7% of Ashford's residents engaged with the arts in person in the previous 12 months which is in line with Thanet (93.7%) and higher than several neighbouring boroughs including Folkestone & Hythe (88.5%) and Canterbury (90.5%). This can be partly attributed to Ashford's annual festivals and events – where community participation is central to the programme.
- Huge impacts have also been achieved by resident National Portfolio Organisation Jasmin Vardimon Company, who run distinctive educational programmes and workshops at all levels from children to professional development.
- Local engagement suggests that Ashford residents are not always well-served for culture locally and may travel to other Kent destinations for some cultural activity.

Vision and Ambition



The background image is a collage of night-time scenes from Ashford. The top left shows a street lamp and falling confetti. The top right shows a building with a large, colorful, abstract sculpture. The bottom left shows a street sign for 'County Square & Bus Stop' and 'St Mary's Church'. The bottom right shows a 'MOBILE COTTAGE' sign for 'FAST & PROFESSIONAL REPAIR' and a 'YOUR LOCAL DOCTOR' sign. The central text is overlaid on a dark blue rectangular background.

Strong Strategic Vision

Ashford's cultural vision is centred on using arts, culture and creativity to:

- Grow the creative economy.
- Support town centre regeneration.
- Increase footfall and vibrancy.
- Enhance quality of life and community wellbeing.
- Develop Ashford's reputation as a creative and cultural destination.

Strong Strategic Vision

Key Priorities

Strengthen the Creative Economy

- Attract and retain creative businesses.
- Support professional artists and creative companies.
- Develop creative production and cultural infrastructure.
- Create opportunities for local creative talent.
- Offer a place to create, developing new productions

Develop Cultural Infrastructure

- Create new cultural venues and performance spaces.
- Deliver public art and cultural placemaking.
- Integrate culture into regeneration and new developments.

Support Festivals and Events

- Build on Ashford's programme of arts events and festivals.
- Increase visitor numbers and town centre activity.
- Raise Ashford's cultural profile regionally and nationally.



The background image shows a town street at night. On the left, there's a building with a classical facade. In the center, a street sign for 'County Square & Rail Road' is visible. The street is decorated with festive lights, including a large, illuminated Christmas tree in the foreground. On the right, a building with a red sign for 'MOBILE COTTAGE FAST & PROFESSIONAL REPAIR' is visible. The overall atmosphere is festive and urban.

Strong Strategic Vision

Key Priorities

Reuse Historic Buildings

A major current priority is now the redevelopment of the former Odeon/Mecca building as: a flexible theatre (up to 176 seated, or 212 standing), gallery and exhibition space, café/bar, creative workspace, community activity venue, and event hire facility.

Culture-Led Regeneration

The Council increasingly views culture as a tool for town centre renewal, economic development, community cohesion, and place-making.

Cultural Ecology



| Cultural Ecology – An Overview

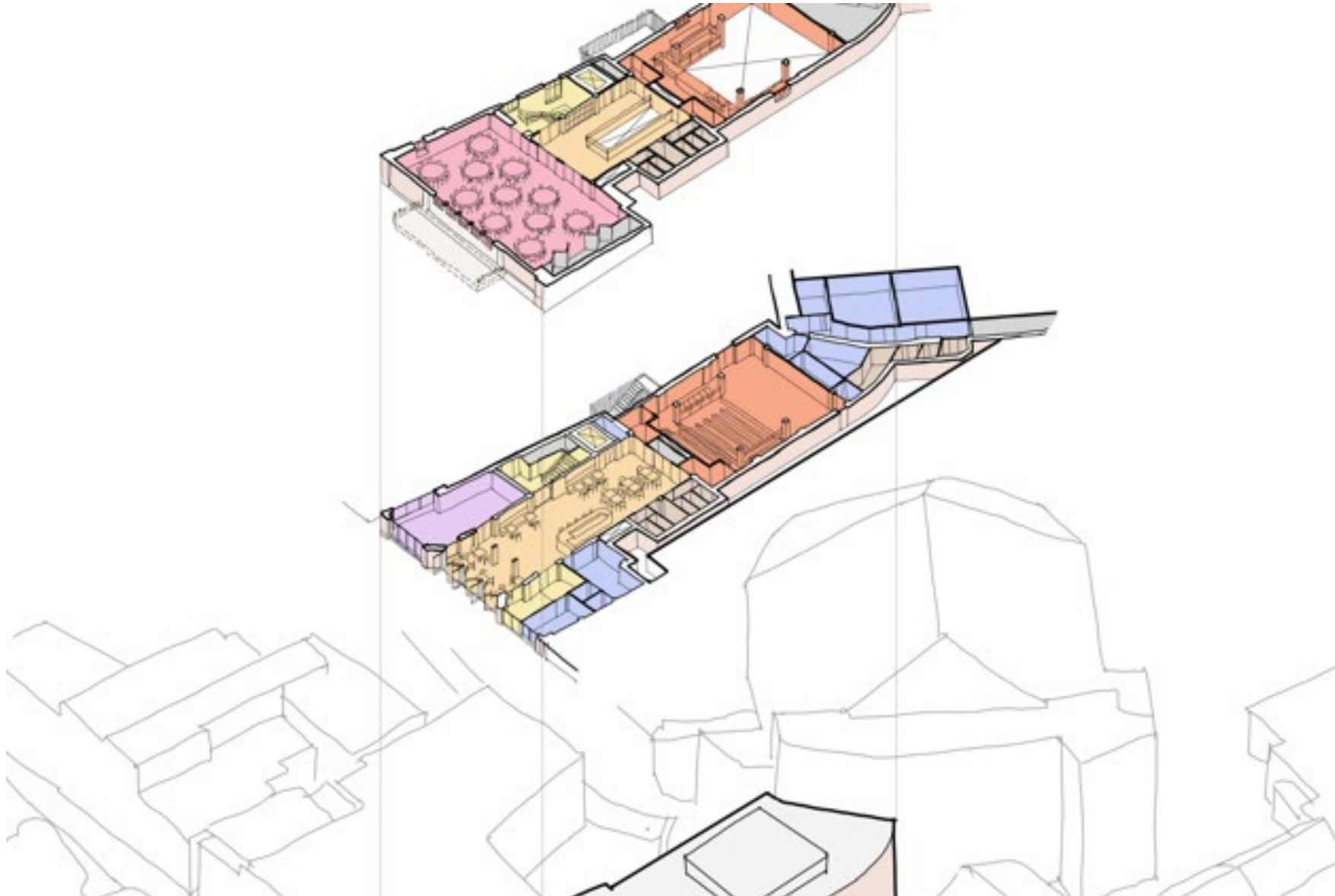
- **Revelation** -The borough's flagship small-scale performance venue, based within St Mary's Church. Hosts live music, theatre, talks, film, comedy and community events and attracts around 8,500 attendees annually.
- **Jasmin Vardimon Company & JV Home** - One of the UK's leading contemporary dance companies, and Arts Council NPO are headquartered in Ashford since 2012. Its purpose-built creative hub includes performance space, rehearsal studios, education facilities, café and creative incubator space.
- **The Ashford Cinema** – A 6- Screen local cinema, workspace, and bar located in Elwick Place in the Town Centre, and currently undergoing a major multi-million pound transformation to create an all-day family entertainment hub.
- **Kent Music** - Based in the Creative Enterprise Quarter is the Counties prominent music education charity, and the lead organisation for the Kent & Medway Music Hub.
- **Made in Ashford & Craftship Enterprise** - A creative marketplace and maker ecosystem supporting local artists, craftspeople and creative entrepreneurs through retail, exhibitions, workshops and pop-up activity.
- **Coachworks Ashford, Beerhall & Street Food** - An increasingly important cultural and social venue combining food, music, events, festivals, creative markets and community programming. It has become a key destination within Ashford's evening economy.

| Cultural Ecology – An Overview

- **Dance Schools** – A number of Dance schools and studios are set up in and around the Town Centre including Liv2Dance and Galaxy Dance.
- **Ashford Museum and St Mary's Heritage Quarter** - The historic core of Ashford's cultural offer, combining local heritage, exhibitions and interpretation of the town's history.
- **Festivals and Events Programme** - Ashford supports a year-round programme of festivals, outdoor events, performances and cultural commissions, helping animate the town centre and raise the borough's cultural profile including: Carnival of the Baubles, Create Music Village and the Ashford Food Festival.
- **Ashford “Unframed” Street Art** - A growing collection of public art, murals and placemaking projects integrated into regeneration initiatives and town-centre renewal.

Odeon / Arts Centre Redevelopment - The former Odeon redevelopment is intended to become a new cultural anchor and is likely to become the next major component of Ashford's cultural ecology.

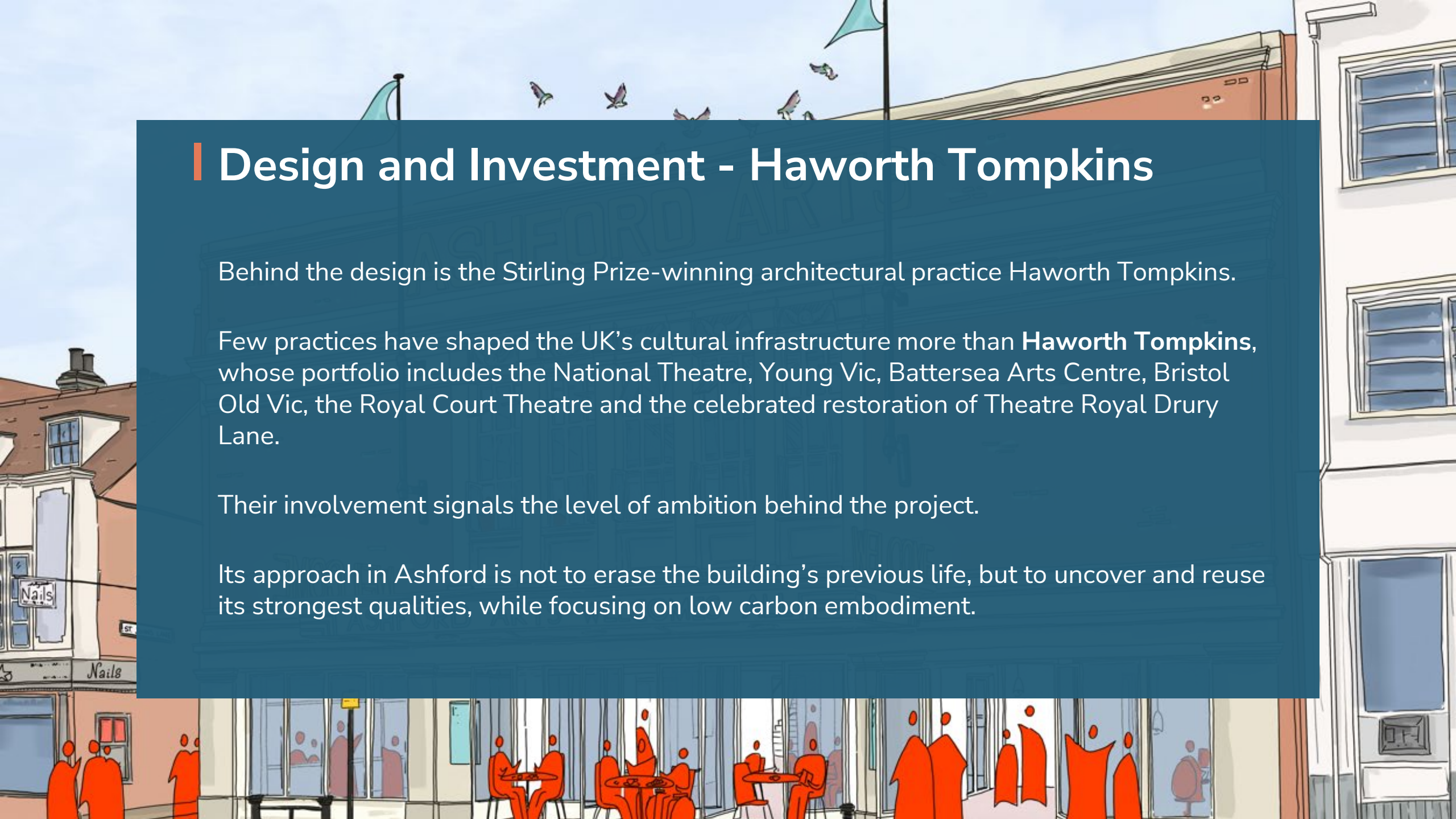
Design Overview & Investment



The background of the slide features a stylized illustration of a town street. On the left, a building with a 'Nails' sign is visible. In the center, a large blue rectangular box contains the title and a list of bullet points. To the right, another building with multiple windows is shown. At the bottom, a row of stylized orange figures is depicted, some standing and some sitting at tables, suggesting a public space or cafe area.

| Design and Investment

- Ashford Borough Council is moving forward with plans to bring the former Odeon/Mecca Bingo building back into cultural use. This major step supports the Borough Plan 2024–28 and answers the community's strong call for more arts, cultural and performance space in the town centre.
- The proposal transforms the front part of the building - including restoration of its art deco style High Street frontage, foyer and first floor spaces into a small arts, cultural and community theatre venue.
- Ashford is a town that is changing - with a growing creative sector, new businesses and a community that continues to support more cultural activity.
- The former Odeon provides a unique chance to create a public facing cultural anchor on the High Street.
- **Investment.** The Council's Stage 2 cost plan estimates capital investment in the Phase One works at approximately £7.1 million (ex VAT), to be refined through RIBA Stage 3.



| Design and Investment - Haworth Tompkins

Behind the design is the Stirling Prize-winning architectural practice Haworth Tompkins.

Few practices have shaped the UK's cultural infrastructure more than **Haworth Tompkins**, whose portfolio includes the National Theatre, Young Vic, Battersea Arts Centre, Bristol Old Vic, the Royal Court Theatre and the celebrated restoration of Theatre Royal Drury Lane.

Their involvement signals the level of ambition behind the project.

Its approach in Ashford is not to erase the building's previous life, but to uncover and reuse its strongest qualities, while focusing on low carbon embodiment.



The background of the slide features a stylized illustration of a town street. On the left, there's a building with a sign that says 'Nails' and a street sign that says 'ST'. Below it, another sign says 'Nails'. In the foreground, several red silhouettes of people are shown: some are standing and talking, while others are sitting at small round tables. The scene is set against a light blue sky with a few birds flying. The overall style is a simple, colorful line drawing.

| Design and Investment

“ This project marks a major step toward revitalising one of Ashford’s most recognisable assets, along with continuing to create a strong cultural offer for the town, and I’m pleased to see it progressing with real momentum. I fully support the exciting concept design and the initial business plan considerations.”

Cllr Noel Ovenden , Leader of the Council

The Council wants the venue to be a hub that can grow and adapt with the changing needs of the community – supporting creative activity, learning and participation, while also helping to bring more people into the town centre throughout the day and evening.

Together, these features support the Council’s aim for a thriving mixed use town centre, as set out in the Plan for the Borough 2024–28.

The background of the slide features a colorful illustration of a street scene. On the left, there's a building with a sign that says 'Nails' and a street sign that says 'ST'. Below it, two stylized figures in red are walking. On the right, there's a building with several windows. In the center, there are flags on poles and birds flying in the sky. The overall style is a hand-drawn, sketchy illustration.

| Design and Investment – Space Schedule and Capacities

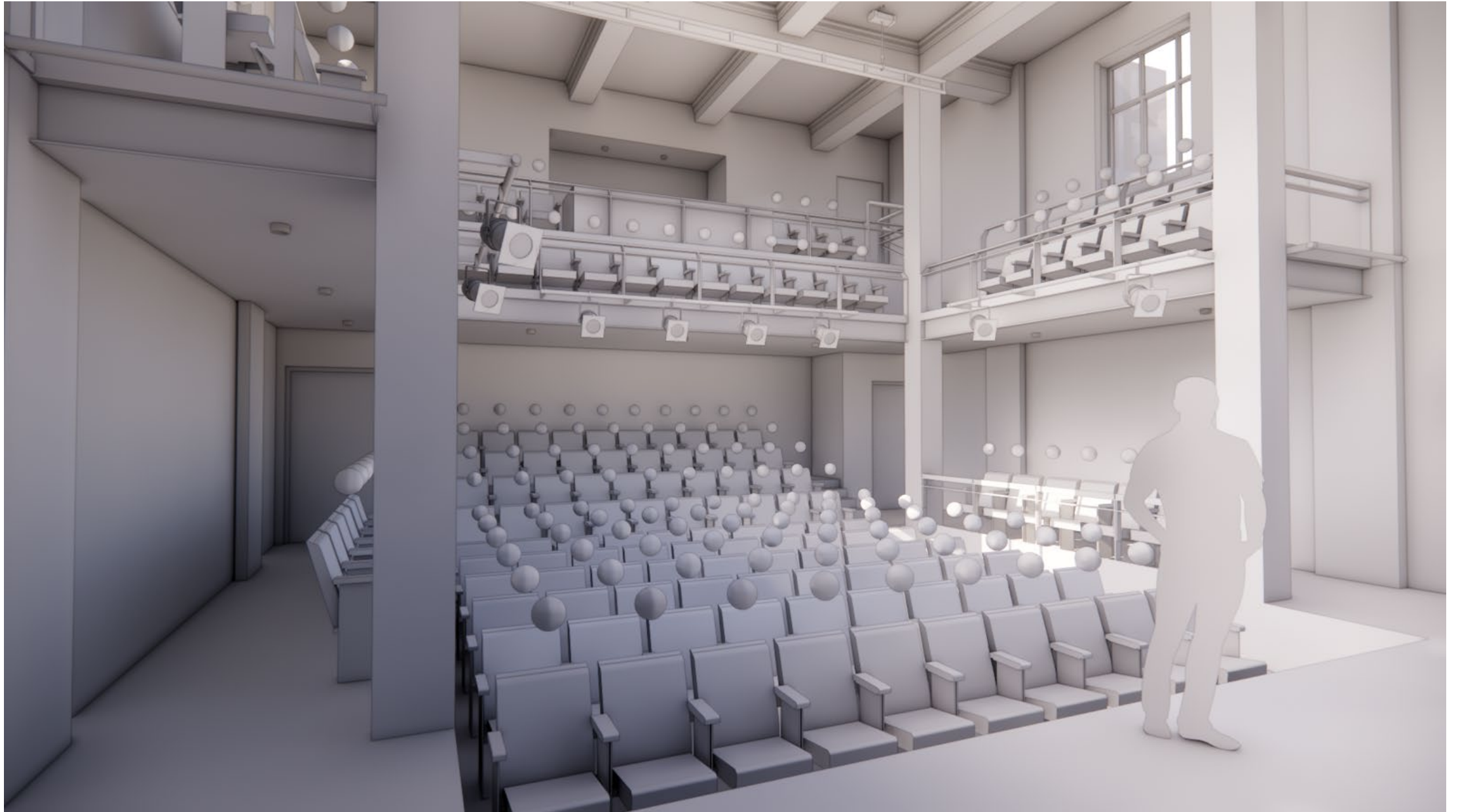
- RIBA Stage 2 Concept Design is complete.
- Stage 3 Developed Design is now underway, informing a planning application targeted for September 2026.
- Studio Theatre: up to 176 seated (172 including 4 wheelchair positions), or 212 standing (170 standing in the stalls, plus 42 seated in the balcony). A flexible retractable seating and rostra system also supports comedy, cabaret and gig formats ranging from 94 to 156.
- Dance Hall: approximately 145 sqm, with capacity varying by use, from around 45 seated for a dance or performance layout up to around 132 seated for a fashion-show style layout (110 seated in a typical gala configuration).
- Flexible gallery/workspace: approximately 43 sqm and 52 sqm of street-facing space for exhibitions, meetings and workshops.
- Café and kitchen: capacity for approximately 42 covers at ground floor, with additional breakout space at first floor.
- Full architectural drawings and detailed capacity workings for each configuration are included in the appendices pack.

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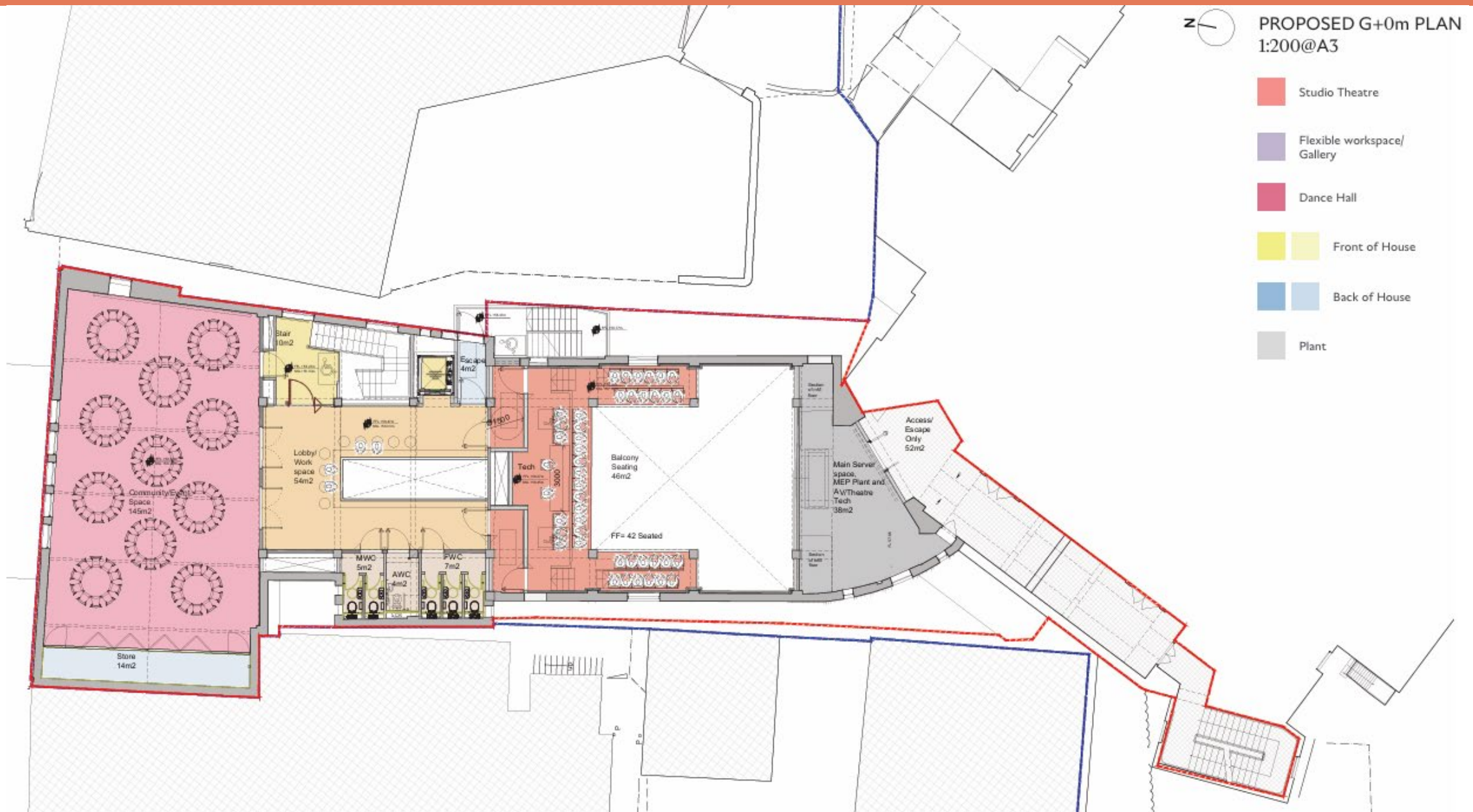
| Design and Investment - Access, Servicing and Back of House

- Public entrance from the High Street via a gentle ramp into a new weather lobby.
- Auditorium get-in via St John's Lane, with a ramped vehicular drop-off route and an openable service gate for oversized items; secondary service access routes also serve front of house operations, with additional maintenance access to the yard.
- Back of house: a primary accessible dressing, shower and WC facility (up to four make-up stations) off the main circulation corridor, plus two further c.20 sqm dressing rooms for ensemble casts or school groups.
- Building services: a 300A electrical supply covers building services and theatre show power, with dedicated HVAC to the Studio Theatre, Dance Hall, office, workshop/gallery, kitchen and WCs, and DALI lighting control throughout.
- Step-free access is provided throughout the building via ramps and a platform lift.
- Full technical, structural and services reports are included in the appendix.

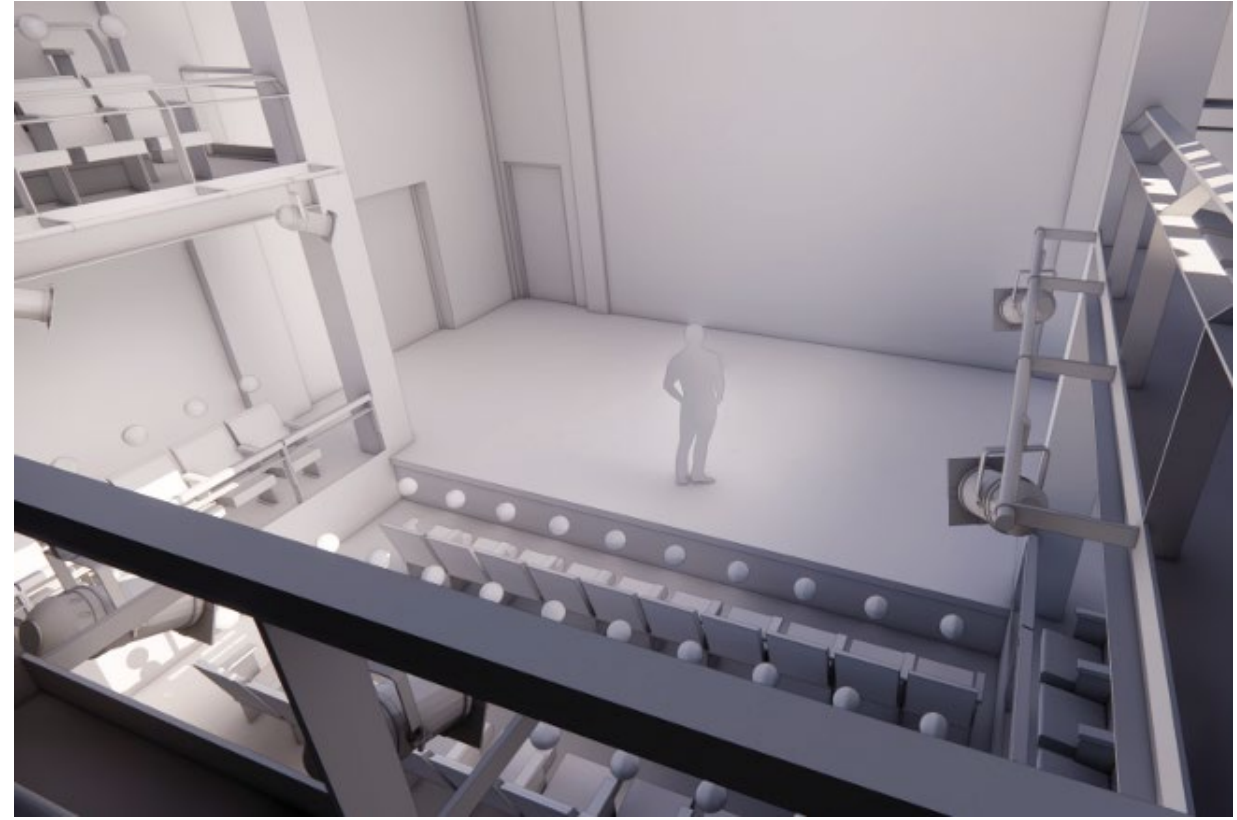
Ground Floor Plan



First Floor Plan



First Floor Plan



Operating Model Overview



| Operating Overview

- The venue is best understood as a **multi-purpose cultural and community hub** rather than solely a performance venue. Long-term sustainability depends on balancing artistic excellence with community engagement, commercial income generation and a diverse funding model. Ticket sales alone are unlikely to cover operating costs, making a mixed-income approach essential to success.
- The venue's programme should combine **professional performances, community participation, creative learning, exhibitions and commercial events**. This balance enables the venue to attract a broad audience, maximise use of the building throughout the day and year, and deliver the required social outcomes.
- Participation activities are a core part of the operating model, not an addition. Programmes for children and young people, schools, older adults and underrepresented communities help strengthen local engagement while supporting priorities around inclusion, wellbeing and lifelong learning.
- Commercial activity provides an important source of unrestricted income. Regular venue hire for business events, conferences, private functions and community groups can provide predictable revenue, while Ashford's growing population, excellent transport links and expanding business base present opportunities to develop new markets and partnerships.

| Operating Overview

- The café and bar should be viewed as a strategic business function rather than a supporting service. By operating throughout the day and alongside evening performances, hospitality generates valuable income, encourages longer visits and helps position the venue as a welcoming destination for the wider community, regardless of whether visitors are attending an event.
- Financial resilience relies on a **blended funding model**, combining earned income with public investment, charitable trusts, sponsorship, memberships and donations. Public funding plays an important catalytic role by enabling artistic and community programmes while strengthening the organisation's ability to attract additional investment.
- **Operating hours and licensing.** The venue is expected to operate across daytime, evening and weekend use, spanning performance, hospitality and community activity. Exact hours and the associated premises licensing approach are to be agreed between ABC and the appointed operator.

Overall, the operational model for the venue should position it as a **year-round cultural hub that integrates artistic programming, community participation, commercial enterprise and partnerships... working to deliver both cultural value and long-term financial sustainability.**

Benchmark Venues





01 - ENTRANCE / CANOPY
(Bush Theatre, HT)



02 - FOYER / GATHERING / CAFE
(Young Vic, HT)



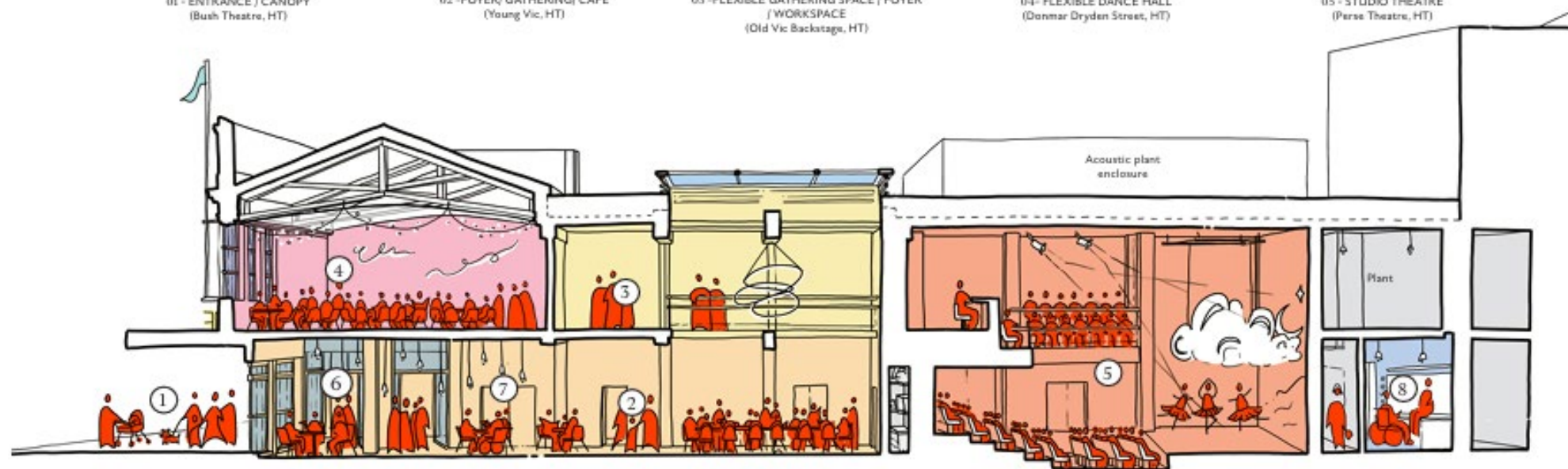
03 - FLEXIBLE GATHERING SPACE / FOYER
/ WORKSPACE
(Old Vic Backstage, HT)



04 - FLEXIBLE DANCE HALL
(Donmar Dryden Street, HT)



05 - STUDIO THEATRE
(Perse Theatre, HT)



OFFICE
(Young Vic, HT)



06 - FLEXIBLE WORKSPACE/GALLERY
(Royal College of Arts, HT)



07 - STAIRS
(Donmar Dryden Street, HT)



WCs
(Old Vic Backstage, HT)



08 - DRESSING ROOMS
(Bush Theatre, HT)

| Benchmark Venues

Tobacco Factory Theatres, Bristol

A highly entrepreneurial charitable theatre demonstrating how a 200–250 seat venue can achieve strong commercial resilience through high levels of self-generated income. Its successful integration of hospitality, flexible performance spaces and venue hire makes it a strong commercial benchmark for Ashford's proposed operating model.

Arcola Theatre, London

A heritage building conversion that successfully combines professional theatre, community engagement and commercial activity. The venue's charity and trading subsidiary model, together with its active café/bar and high street location, provides a strong example of balancing artistic ambition with financial sustainability.

Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool

A charitable organisation operating from a historic Art Deco building with a strong local identity. It demonstrates the value of locally relevant programming, flexible secondary performance spaces and measuring economic impact, while highlighting how heritage venues can become major civic assets.

South Street Arts Centre, Reading

A council-owned and operated venue providing an important governance comparison for Ashford. It illustrates the strengths of civic ownership in delivering community access but also highlights the limitations of limited hospitality provision and the importance of developing diversified earned income.

Park Theatre, London

A purpose-built charitable neighbourhood theatre that has established itself as a cultural destination through two flexible performance spaces, community engagement and an integrated café/bar. It demonstrates how a relatively small venue can build a strong local identity and loyal audiences.

Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

A dual-space venue recognised for maximising utilisation through independently operating performance spaces, an all-day café/bar and significant venue hire activity. It provides a valuable model for generating income beyond performances and activating spaces throughout the week.

| Benchmark Venues

Bristol Old Vic

One of the UK's leading examples of successfully redeveloping a historic theatre by placing hospitality and public spaces at the centre of the visitor experience. The council-charity partnership, improved foyer and commercial offer significantly increased earned income and audience engagement.

Bush Theatre, London

A former public library transformed into a vibrant theatre with café, bar and studio space. It demonstrates how a heritage building can become an active high street destination by combining high-quality artistic programming with strong community engagement and daytime activation.

Battersea Arts Centre (BAC), London

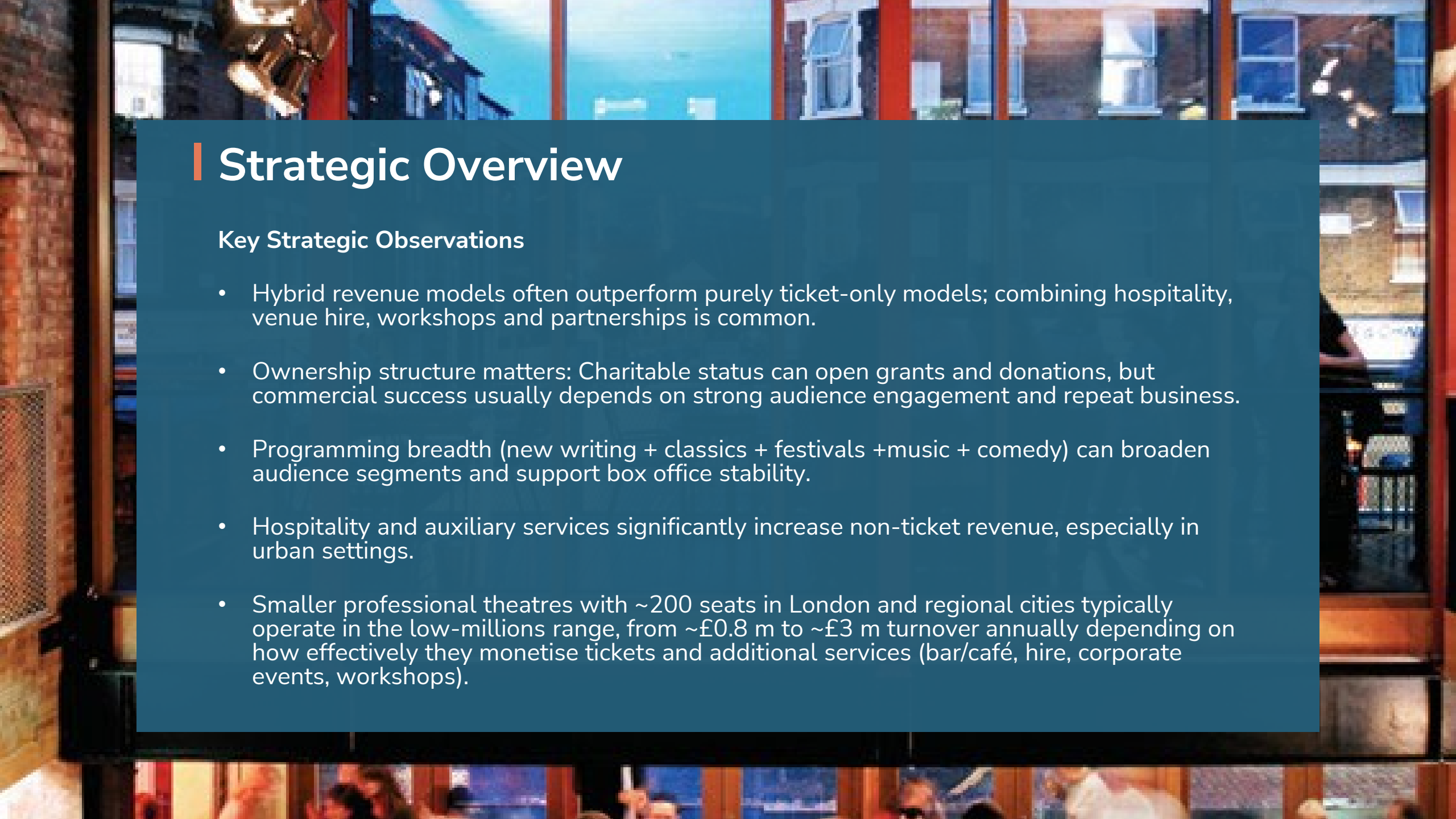
A nationally recognised example of a large civic heritage building successfully repurposed into a flexible cultural venue. Its extensive commercial hires, destination bar, community participation and council-charity lease model provide an excellent benchmark for maximising use of a multi-functional building.

Young Vic Theatre, London

A highly flexible multi-space venue where the restaurant, bar and public spaces operate as destinations in their own right. It demonstrates how multiple independently functioning spaces can increase utilisation, broaden programming and strengthen financial sustainability.

Department, Ryde (Isle of Wight)

Perhaps the closest contemporary comparator for Ashford. A historic high street building converted into a mixed-use cultural hub incorporating performance spaces, cinema, café/bar, artist studios, retail and community facilities. Its local authority lease, placemaking role and blended commercial model closely mirror the aspirations for Ashford Arts and provide valuable operational insights from a recently opened venue.



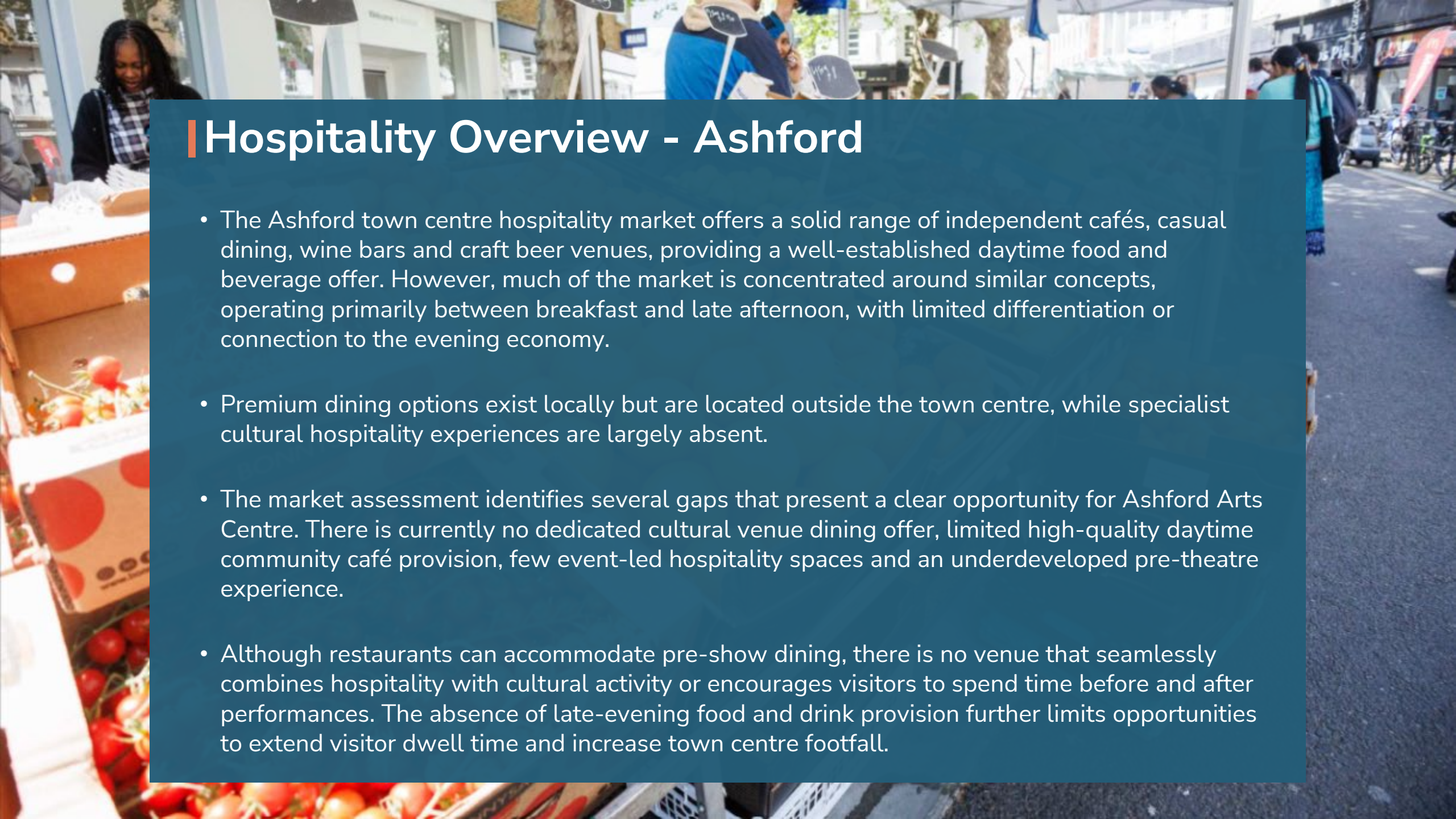
| Strategic Overview

Key Strategic Observations

- Hybrid revenue models often outperform purely ticket-only models; combining hospitality, venue hire, workshops and partnerships is common.
- Ownership structure matters: Charitable status can open grants and donations, but commercial success usually depends on strong audience engagement and repeat business.
- Programming breadth (new writing + classics + festivals + music + comedy) can broaden audience segments and support box office stability.
- Hospitality and auxiliary services significantly increase non-ticket revenue, especially in urban settings.
- Smaller professional theatres with ~200 seats in London and regional cities typically operate in the low-millions range, from ~£0.8 m to ~£3 m turnover annually depending on how effectively they monetise tickets and additional services (bar/café, hire, corporate events, workshops).

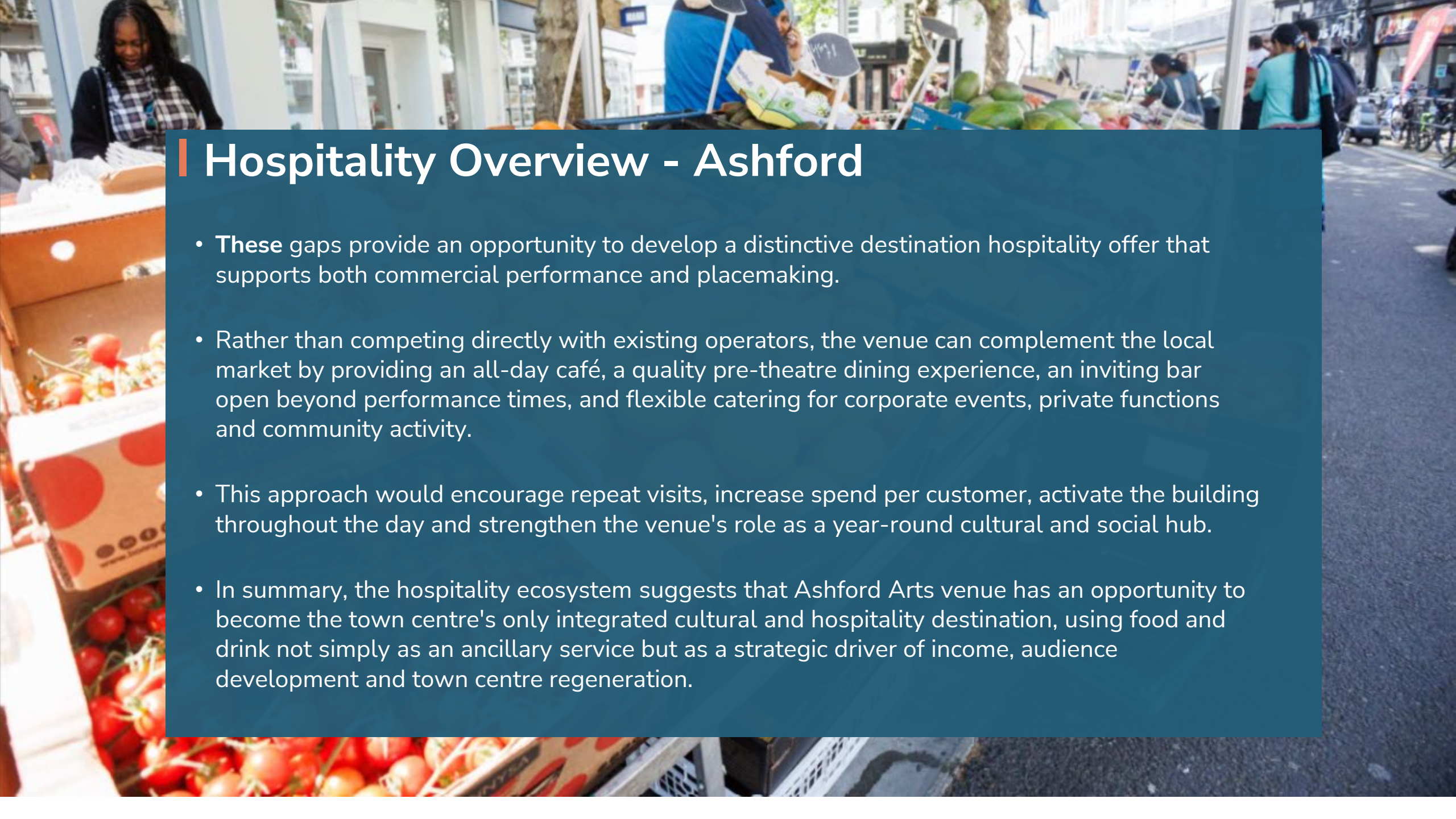
Hospitality Overview





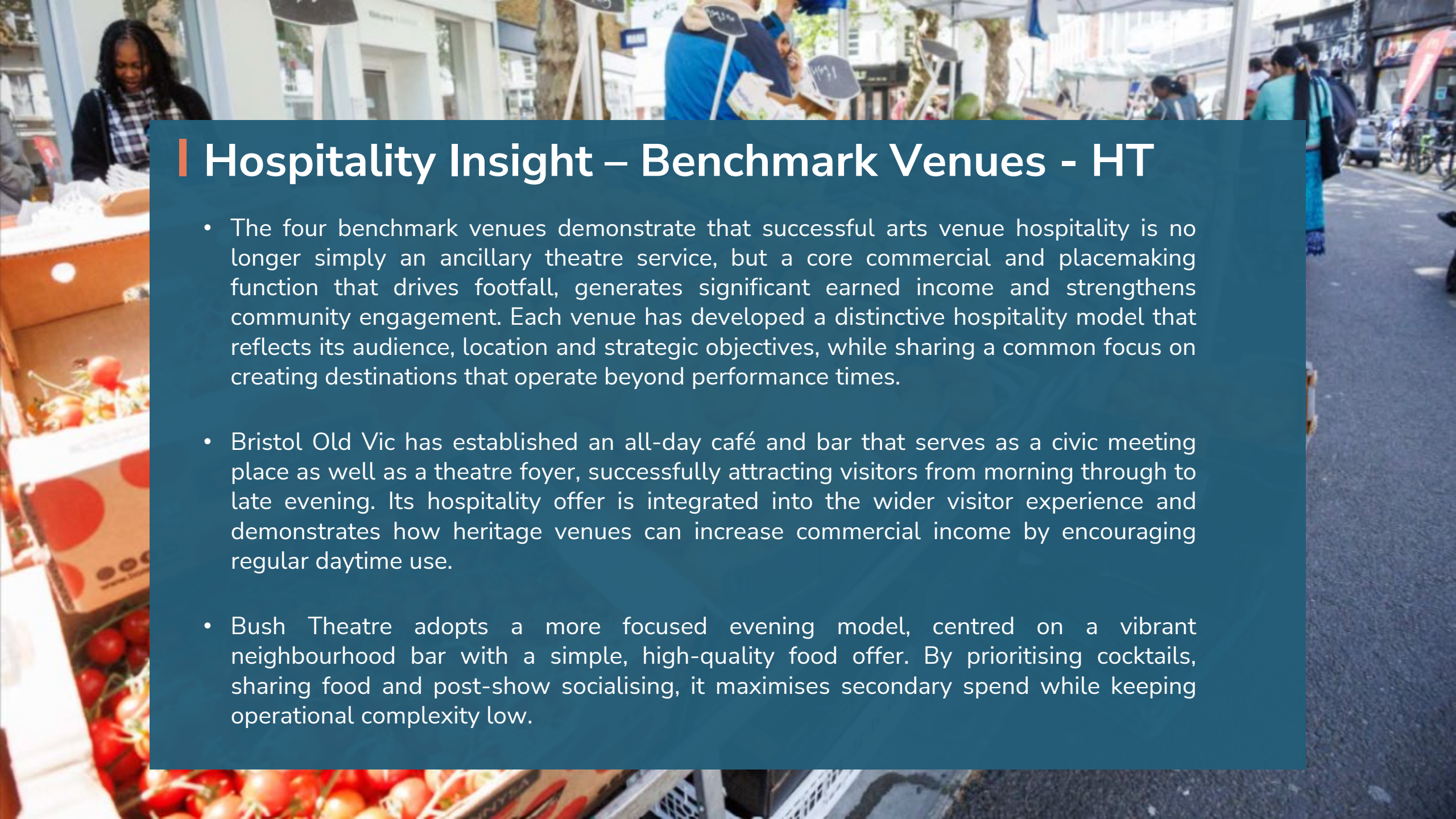
| Hospitality Overview - Ashford

- The Ashford town centre hospitality market offers a solid range of independent cafés, casual dining, wine bars and craft beer venues, providing a well-established daytime food and beverage offer. However, much of the market is concentrated around similar concepts, operating primarily between breakfast and late afternoon, with limited differentiation or connection to the evening economy.
- Premium dining options exist locally but are located outside the town centre, while specialist cultural hospitality experiences are largely absent.
- The market assessment identifies several gaps that present a clear opportunity for Ashford Arts Centre. There is currently no dedicated cultural venue dining offer, limited high-quality daytime community café provision, few event-led hospitality spaces and an underdeveloped pre-theatre experience.
- Although restaurants can accommodate pre-show dining, there is no venue that seamlessly combines hospitality with cultural activity or encourages visitors to spend time before and after performances. The absence of late-evening food and drink provision further limits opportunities to extend visitor dwell time and increase town centre footfall.



| Hospitality Overview - Ashford

- **These** gaps provide an opportunity to develop a distinctive destination hospitality offer that supports both commercial performance and placemaking.
- Rather than competing directly with existing operators, the venue can complement the local market by providing an all-day café, a quality pre-theatre dining experience, an inviting bar open beyond performance times, and flexible catering for corporate events, private functions and community activity.
- This approach would encourage repeat visits, increase spend per customer, activate the building throughout the day and strengthen the venue's role as a year-round cultural and social hub.
- In summary, the hospitality ecosystem suggests that Ashford Arts venue has an opportunity to become the town centre's only integrated cultural and hospitality destination, using food and drink not simply as an ancillary service but as a strategic driver of income, audience development and town centre regeneration.



| Hospitality Insight – Benchmark Venues - HT

- The four benchmark venues demonstrate that successful arts venue hospitality is no longer simply an ancillary theatre service, but a core commercial and placemaking function that drives footfall, generates significant earned income and strengthens community engagement. Each venue has developed a distinctive hospitality model that reflects its audience, location and strategic objectives, while sharing a common focus on creating destinations that operate beyond performance times.
- Bristol Old Vic has established an all-day café and bar that serves as a civic meeting place as well as a theatre foyer, successfully attracting visitors from morning through to late evening. Its hospitality offer is integrated into the wider visitor experience and demonstrates how heritage venues can increase commercial income by encouraging regular daytime use.
- Bush Theatre adopts a more focused evening model, centred on a vibrant neighbourhood bar with a simple, high-quality food offer. By prioritising cocktails, sharing food and post-show socialising, it maximises secondary spend while keeping operational complexity low.

The background image shows a vibrant street market scene. In the foreground, there are several cardboard boxes filled with fresh, ripe red tomatoes. A woman with dark hair, wearing a plaid shirt, is seen from the chest up, looking down at something in her hands. In the background, other people are visible, including a man in a blue shirt and another person in a green top. The setting appears to be an outdoor market with various stalls and buildings in the distance.

| Hospitality Insight – Benchmark Venues - HT

- Battersea Arts Centre positions hospitality as the social heart of the building, creating a welcoming community hub that supports workshops, meetings, corporate events and performances alike. Its café and bar play an important placemaking role, ensuring the venue remains active throughout the day and week.
- Young Vic represents the most commercially ambitious model, operating a destination restaurant, café and bar that trades successfully as an independent hospitality business. Its premium offer attracts theatre audiences alongside local residents, professionals and visitors, generating significant revenue regardless of the performance programme.
- Collectively, these venues demonstrate that the strongest hospitality models combine quality food and drink, flexible all-day trading, strong local identity and integration with wider cultural activity. For Ashford, the opportunity is to adopt a hybrid approach that blends Bristol Old Vic's all-day café culture, Battersea Arts Centre's community focus, Bush Theatre's efficient evening offer and Young Vic's commercial ambition to create the town centre's first integrated cultural and hospitality destination.

The Future



| Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) — Purpose

- Ashford Borough Council is undertaking preliminary market engagement in advance of a potential procurement process for the appointment of an operator or leaseholder to run Ashford Arts Centre.
- The purpose is to understand current market capacity and appetite among cultural, community and commercial operators; test the contract structure against real operator experience; inform the proposed procurement route, contract structure and specification; and identify opportunities for community engagement, accessible pricing and high-quality content programming.
- This is not a call for competition and does not commit the Council to commence a procurement process.

| Partnership Opportunity

- The Council intends to appoint an operator or leaseholder to run Ashford Arts Centre once complete, on a lease or concession basis pending final classification.
- Indicative lease or concession term of approximately 15 to 25 years from operational handover, with a start date to be confirmed once the design and construction programme is finalised.
- The Council acknowledges that some form of public revenue support may be required to enable the venue to operate sustainably; the level and structure of this has not yet been determined and will be informed by this engagement.

I PME Questions — Operating Model

- How have you tailored programming to venues of a similar scale and configuration, including managing concurrent use of multiple spaces?
- How have you approached affordable and accessible pricing and local community engagement at venues you have operated?
- What operating models and commercial structures have you used at comparable venues, and which would you expect to suit a venue of this size?
- Based on your experience, what would be a realistic view of the cost drivers, revenue mix and any public revenue support needed for a venue of this scale to operate sustainably?

I PME Questions — Capability & Delivery

- What is your experience of operating similar size theatres or comparable venues, and what cultural output or content have you delivered?
- What support have you provided designing the technical and production specification for similar venues as part of the RIBA Stage 3 to 5 design process, and how was your content strategy aligned to that specification?
- What have been the key risks and mitigations in delivering a sustainable operating model at comparable venues, and what lead in time would you expect between appointment and opening?
- What partnerships have you developed with local or cultural organisations, and what is your approach to digital, marketing and environmental sustainability?

| Timetable

- **w/c 3rd August 2026.** PME notice and this prospectus published on Find a Tender, with operator questions issued alongside, in response to interested parties' request.
- **Friday 7th August 2026.** Registration for the Operator Market Day closes.
- **Wednesday 12th August 2026.** Operator Market Day, held via Teams.
- **Friday 28th August 2026.** Written expressions of interest and responses due, two weeks after the Operator Market Day.

| The Road to Opening

- **September 2026.** Planning application submitted, alongside the operator procurement process running in parallel.
- **Winter 2026.** Operator selected and appointed following evaluation of tender responses.
- **Winter 2026 to 2027.** Planning decision, and the building contract sum finalised and agreed with the appointed contractor.
- **2027.** Main construction and fit-out works on site, delivering the refurbished building and new performance, gallery and community spaces.
- **Summer 2028.** Ashford Arts Centre opens to the public.

Timeline indicative and subject to planning consent, contractor appointment and final programme confirmation.

| Submission Instructions

- **Deadline.** Submissions via Find a Tender Portal by Friday 28th August 2026, two weeks after the Operator Market Day.
- **Format.** The Council is intentionally not specifying a format, to allow imaginative responses. A 10–20 page deck or document is a useful guide.
- **Confidentiality.** Please indicate whether your submission may be shared publicly or treated in confidence.
- Contact Details:
 - Julian Russell
 - 07584 102287
 - julian@bluehorizon-ventures.com

| Evaluation Process

- This is not a call for competition. Responses will not be scored and will not be used to pre-qualify or exclude any organisation.
- Following this engagement, the Council may: refine its delivery model and requirements; publish a formal procurement notice; or decide not to proceed.
- Information provided will be used solely to inform the Council's procurement strategy.
- Commercially sensitive information will not be disclosed publicly.

| Frequently Asked Questions

- **Is this a competitive process?** No. This is preliminary market engagement only; it does not commit the Council to a procurement process and responses are not scored.
- **Do we need to attend the Operator Market Day to take part?** No, though attendance is encouraged. Written responses are welcome in whichever format best suits your organisation; ABC to confirm final arrangements.
- **Will our submission be kept confidential?** You can indicate whether your submission may be shared publicly or should be treated in confidence, as set out in the Submission Instructions.
- **What happens after the engagement closes?** The Council may refine its delivery model and requirements, publish a formal procurement notice, or decide not to proceed.
- **What about operating hours and licensing?** These are still to be confirmed with ABC; see the Operating Overview section.

| What Does Success Look Like

- A Sustainable Operating Model – under a financially resilient, low-subsidy partnership that balances civic purpose with commercial strength.
- A Year-Round Cultural and Events Destination – A vibrant programme of performances, festivals, hospitality, conferencing, and community use that drives consistent footfall and spend throughout the year.
- Enhanced Economic Impact – Tangible contribution to Ashford's daytime and night-time economy through visitor growth, secondary spend, and local supply-chain engagement.
- Innovation and Future-Proofing – The adoption of creative technologies, sustainable building practices, and new event formats that respond to evolving audience and market expectations.
- Social Value and Community Benefit – Measurable outcomes in local employment, training, volunteering, and access for community groups, ensuring the venue remains inclusive and a publicly valued asset.

In Summary



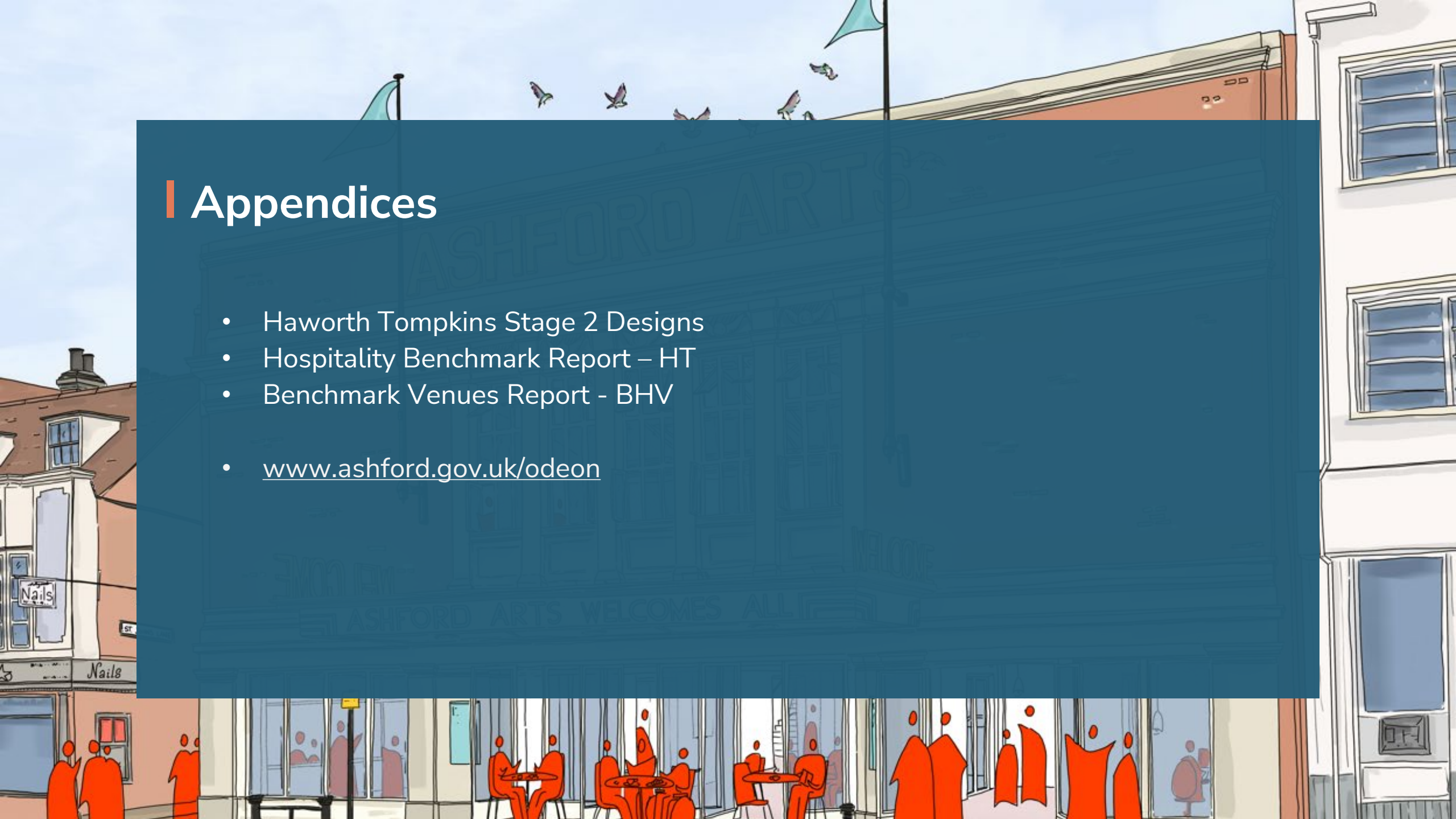


| In Summary

- Iconic venue with a range of flexible spaces in a central location.
- Award winning architect.
- Strong cultural vision and ecology.
- Town growth and tourism stats provide significant economic opportunity for the future.
- Significant growing population with a growing cultural demand as a result.
- Strong educational infrastructure.
- A wide range of successful benchmark venues to demonstrate the commercial and community opportunity the venue could provide.

Appendices

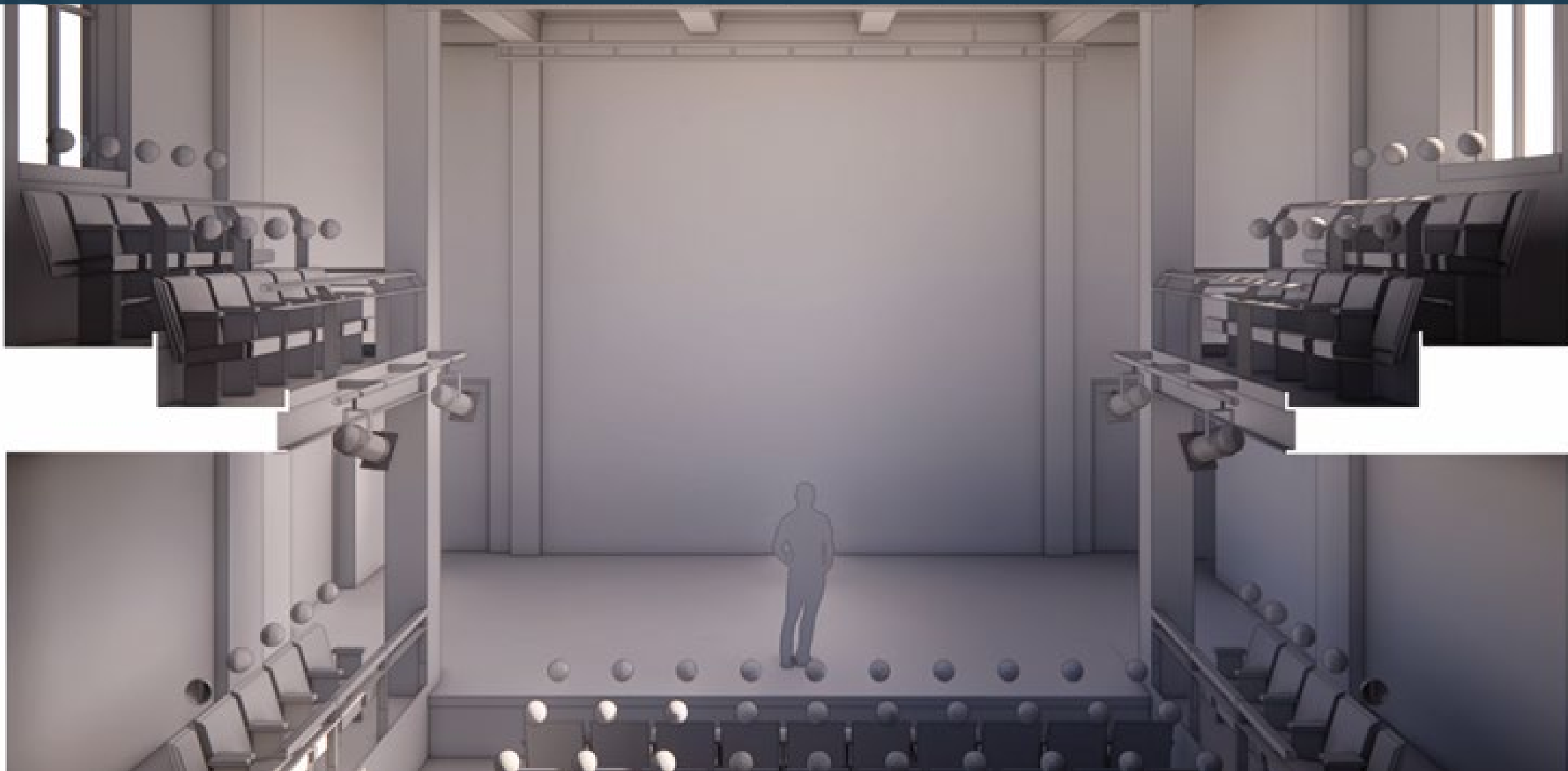


The background of the slide is a colorful illustration of a street scene. On the left, there's a building with a sign that says 'Nails'. In the center, a large blue semi-transparent rectangle covers most of the slide, containing the title and list. To the right, there's a white building with windows. At the bottom, there's a row of stylized orange figures sitting at tables, suggesting an outdoor cafe or seating area. The sky is light blue with a few birds flying.

| Appendices

- Haworth Tompkins Stage 2 Designs
- Hospitality Benchmark Report – HT
- Benchmark Venues Report - BHV
- www.ashford.gov.uk/odeon

The Stage is Set...





Goodbye, see you soon