

Stage set for new mutli-million pound Oldham Coliseum theatre in cultural quarter

By Aimee Belmore -

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OLDHAM IS to build a new Coliseum Theatre in its budding Cultural Quarter after the plans were awarded a multi-million pound funding injection.

A successful Round 2 joint funding bid by Oldham Council and Oldham Coliseum Theatre has seen Arts Council England approve a grant worth £7.1m towards the project.

Alongside a future fundraising contribution agreed with the theatre, this now triggers the green light for it to move from its Fairbottom Street home to a new state-of-the-art facility.



Kevin Shaw, Oldham Coliseum Theatre's Artistic Director and Chief Executive and Jean Stretton, Oldham

Council Leader, overlooking the Southgate Street site where the new Coliseum will be built

The new theatre will boast a 550-seat main auditorium and a 170-seat studio theatre with improved front-of-house facilities.

The new-build project will be a central part of Oldham's Cultural Quarter and will be located on the current Southgate Street car park site, with a frontage on Union Street.

This will connect the Coliseum Theatre with a new Heritage and Arts Centre linked with Gallery Oldham, Library and Lifelong Learning centre, all just yards from the Oldham Central Metrolink stop.

The plans are part of an approach approved in September 2015 which commits Oldham Council and its partners to a phased delivery over ten years of a four-stage Cultural Regeneration Programme.

Jean Stretton, Oldham Council Leader, said: "We're delighted to be able to now get on with our plans to deliver a new Oldham Coliseum Theatre.

"The support and shared vision of Arts Council England has been vital and we're extremely grateful for this significant financial contribution which will help us to realise our ambitions.

"Arts, culture and heritage matter. They can inspire education across all ages and communities, boost the local economy, and attract tourism.

"Oldham Coliseum Theatre is a hugely-respected institution in the borough, and beyond. It's a major cultural asset that also delivers lots of important educational work.

"This relocation will widen its profile and ensure it has a bright future as part of our wider regeneration plans.

"You can see with developments like the Old Town Hall and others that we are working to transform our town centre into one that gives our residents greater pride in better facilities and preserved heritage – and will also attract a new type of visitor with a great arts, culture and leisure offer."

This is the second time the theatre has moved, as it was initially on Henshaw Street before moving to Fairbottom Street in 1887 to make way for Tommyfield Market.

Kevin Shaw, Oldham Coliseum Theatre's Artistic Director and Chief Executive, said: "We are immensely proud to be taking our place in Oldham's Cultural Quarter alongside the new Heritage and Arts Centre, as well as Gallery Oldham and Oldham Library.

"We are indebted to the vision of Oldham Council that places a real value on arts and culture for the borough, and for the support of Arts Council England in investing in that vision.

"The current board, staff, volunteers and audiences are all custodians of a proud tradition of theatre in the town, which in the Coliseum's case dates back to 1885.

"It's our responsibility to make a theatre that's right for future generations, meaning in the years to come that theatre in Oldham continues to thrive, grow and develop.

"We are rightfully famous for the warmth of our welcome, and we will take that warmth with us, so future residents of Oldham will feel this is a theatre for absolutely everyone."

Alison Clark, Director North, Arts Council England said: "We are delighted to have made such a major investment in the future of cultural life in Oldham.

"Our capital programme is intended to ensure that artistic activity is embedded in the heart of infrastructural development and this is a great example of how a regeneration programme can demonstrate that the arts are critical to the growth of healthy communities."

The Coliseum scheme got initial planning permission in March 2015. Mecanoo, the project architects, are committed to prioritising the local supply chain throughout this project.

In support of Oldham Council's 'Get Oldham Working' campaign, they are developing an employment and skills strategy to focus on young people within the borough, improving links with local education providers and exploring the opportunity to create apprenticeships.

Mecanoo are currently producing new designs in order to submit a new planning application by March 2017. Construction work is anticipated to start in April 2018 open in 2020.