
BUXTON OPERA HOUSE

A BUSINESS PLAN, 1998-2003

**Prepared for High Peak Theatre Trust Limited
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1. PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

1.1 Our Vision

It is time to light the stars again.¹

High Peak Theatre Trust's vision is to secure the Buxton Opera House as a *leading* theatre in its area, to be the epitome and mirror of *social habit*.

1.2 Our Mission

To build on our historic success in attracting audiences by presenting a highly popular, moving and 'accessible' theatre of world-class quality and standing, and to make the Buxton Opera House - a historic and histrionic masterpiece of theatre architecture - the centre of social, entertainment and cultural life for our area.

The theatre is one of the most useful and expressive implements in a country's moral upbringing: it is a barometer that marks its greatness or decline. A theatre that is sensitive and well balanced in every branch, from tragedy to light comedies, can, within the space of a few years, change the sensitivity of the people. A theatre's deepest essence springs from its organisation.²

1.3 Philosophy and Objectives

The theatre must be carried on as a business or it will fail as an art. A theatre is not the easiest thing to manage: it needs foresight, tact, urbanity, thrift, good taste, eternal vigilance and, above all, the support of the public.³

Hailed as one of the best, intimate Edwardian playhouses in Britain, the Directors believe their primary objective is to encourage maximum use of the Opera House's facilities and resources and to promote, develop and present the theatre at the highest possible standard, in the most efficient manner.

The Trust bases its operations and activities on the principles of excellence and effectiveness through:

1. Attracting the best national and international performances in all art forms within a nationally important Frank Matcham theatre whose situation in the centre of historic Buxton gives it unique selling potential.
2. Providing a stage for the Buxton Opera Festival, other British and international promoters in the High Peak: fulfilling the needs of identified market segments.
3. Fostering popular appreciation of quality theatre and entertainment.
4. Commitment to quality, care, equal opportunities and responsiveness in the conduct of all transactions with theatregoers, artists, suppliers, industry colleagues and stakeholders.

¹ Guillaume Appollinaire, from the prologue to *The Breasts of Tiresias* 1917

² Federico Garcia Lorca 1935

³ Sir Henry Irving from a speech to the Manchester Philosophical Society 1898

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5. Implementation of commercial principles in the management, care, control and maintenance of the Opera House: optimising the net financial contributions from all income generating aspects of the theatre.
 6. Marketing the Opera House to ensure that it is an invigorating and desirable theatre for all sectors of the High Peak population, and for theatregoers from elsewhere in Derbyshire and from its regular catchment area including Staffordshire, South Yorkshire, Cheshire, Greater Manchester as well as for tourists from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and abroad.
 7. Ensuring that staff of the Opera House are highly motivated, well managed and empowered to achieve the theatre's goals in accordance with our Equal Opportunities policies.
 8. Establishing a leadership role for the Opera House as a theatre of repute in the North West.
 9. Ensuring that the theatre contributes to the wider social, educational and economic development of the area.

The Trust operates the House for its historic value and for its contemporary use; with one eye to the past (preservation) and one eye to the new (the shows and audiences of today and tomorrow); the Trust continues a dual mission of restoration and reactivation.

The people will have the theatre; then make it a good one The theatre is irresistible: organise the theatre!⁴

⁴ Matthew Arnold

2. INTRODUCTION TO BUXTON OPERA HOUSE

2.1 The Building

Buxton Opera House - “the theatre in the hills” - was built by architect Frank Matcham in 1903. It is a Grade 2* Listed building, and has a unique and highly valued setting in park-land - the Pavilion Gardens - in the centre of historic Buxton and the wider Peak District.

It has, currently, an audience capacity of 937 (originally accommodating 1176).⁵ The stage measurements are: proscenium opening 30 feet, grid height (hemp house) 49 feet. Widely admired for its architecture, the Opera House is as complete an example of Edwardian theatre architecture as one can hope to find. It is attractively sighted next to Buxton’s Pavilion Gardens, presently being restored with a £ 3.5 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant and the adjacent ‘winter gardens’ which includes a large concert and conference hall.⁶

The Opera House is *special*: it makes theatre goers *want* to be here. Like others built by Matcham, it has a quality not unlike an Italian opera house where, standing in the auditorium or on the stage, the building seems to say ‘*come to me*’. It is a place built for magic. It is arguably one of the two most versatile, immediate and atmospheric theatres in the north west - meaning that it is very good for every performed artform, and superb for drama and opera. From the actor and singer’s vantage, the stage enables the audiences to be drawn into the show.

2.2 Brief Stage History

The Opera House was operated from the outset as a touring theatre, first under the management of the Buxton Gardens Co. Limited, which ran the Opera House within the whole complex of theatre and winter gardens. Seasons included, from the 1930s, annual visits by the Lilian Baylis company from the Old Vic, London. It was used as a cinema from the 1930s until the 1970s, but suffered little alteration.

A sensitive restoration was carried out in 1978/9, at a cost of approximately £500,000. The orchestra pit was enlarged to accommodate 60 players by extending the pit partly under the stage.

The Opera House re-opened in July 1979 with the first Buxton Festival. The Opera House was restored because of the vision and passion of local people, determined to preserve it for live performance, and the enthusiasm and crucial financial support of the local authority. Plans for a Buxton Festival then transformed a local project into one of national interest.

The dedicated and creative commitment of the Board and the theatre’s many voluntary helpers has created a viable *modus operandi* and this commitment continues to be an important element in the theatre’s spirit, and essential to its day to day organisation. The House is a marvel of survival and revival.

⁵ See Lionel Carson (ed.), *The Stage Guide*, The Stage Offices, London, 1912, p. 70.

⁶ Photographic descriptions and effusive appraisals of the Opera House are contained in Ros McCoola, *Theatre in the Hills*, Caron Publications, Chapel-en-le-Frith, 1984 and Brian Walker, *Frank Matcham: Theatre Architect*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1980, pp.142-143.

It has been run as a year-round mixed touring house, hosting medium-scale attractions across all artforms, under the management of the High Peak Theatre Trust Limited.

2.3 Summary of Artistic Policy

The shows on stage lead the work of the Buxton Opera House. It is easier to present theatre than to describe it. It is hard to make this section of the Business Plan read as exciting and tantalising as we know many of the productions to have been - and impossible to make future productions sound as fun as many will doubtless be. In a touring theatre which is not “manufacturing art”, we cannot know more than a few months in advance what lies ahead in the imaginations and creative minds of writers, composers, directors and designers. This Business Plan does not attempt to describe that.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that touring is not solely about delivering productions to theatregoers, for a well-run touring theatre such as Buxton Opera House can have an artistic policy of its own. Our goal is to help reinvent theatre so that it will be interesting and entertaining in the most profound sense. The House occupies a dominant and influential position within its catchment area.

A characteristic of touring, whatever the artform, is the presence of the third party mediating the position between theatre company and the theatregoer: the Opera House and its manager. We are full of artistic idealism but are regulated by the facts of life. Touring theatres have been *neglected by the arts funding system*, with almost all revenue subsidy going to the producing company.

The Opera House’s future plans recognise that selling seats, audience development, outreach and education practice are a shared responsibility of a company and theatre. Buxton Opera House offers visiting companies:

- an excellent stage-audience relationship and, after refurbishment, good working conditions for touring companies. Performers consistently prefer performing in a Frank Matcham theatre because of the atmospheric, three-dimensional rapport between artist, audience member and *all* theatregoers.
- excellent links with its audiences and community, established by the management over twenty years of successful operation.
- a dedicated, experienced and motivated staff.
- partnerships with many artists, companies and entertainers built up since 1979, now poised to develop education work and outreach.
- a large, yet intimate theatre occupying a strong role in a small town at the centre of a large and mixed area: projecting, through its new Theatre Director, a clear vision of what it wants to achieve.

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- a Theatre renowned for lyric work through, inter alia, the international opera festival (Buxton Festival) and, in the past year, as the first theatre offering the performance base for new European Opera Company.

The modern theatre is being delayed only by the lack of funds to re-equip our stages and auditoriums. The modern spectator demands the kind of expenditure which only the tension created by an audience of a thousand can give⁷

⁷ Vsevolod Meyerhold *The Reconstruction of the Theatre* 1925

3. METHODOLOGY

High Peak Borough Council had applied for funding from both the National Heritage Memorial Fund (Heritage Lottery) and the Arts Council of England Lottery Board (the Arts Lottery) for funding towards the capital redevelopment of the Buxton Opera House in March 1996.

Following appraisal of the application, and some modifications to the original proposals, the Heritage Lottery approved in principle - and subject to conditions - the allocation of £509,100 in April 1997. One of the conditions attached to the award was that the Arts Lottery should also be content with the application, and, in particular, be supportive of the detailed operational plans as reflected in the proposed designs and of the Business Plan.

Coincident with the Arts Council's consideration of the Lottery application, the Arts Council Touring Department (in February 1997) commissioned a Management Audit of the Buxton Opera House to be undertaken by Arthur Stafford: Mr Stafford began work in May 1997, delivered a draft report to the Board of the theatre in August, and a final report in early 1998.

In the light of this Management Audit, the Arts Lottery concluded that a re-working of the original application to them was desirable and therefore offered supplementary support to the High Peak Borough Council (as landlords of the Theatre, and therefore responsible for its capital redevelopment) to engage consultants to represent the application, taking account of detailed comments on the original application from assessors and, crucially, taking account of the conclusions of the Stafford Report.

On that basis Positive Solutions were commissioned by the Council and the High Peak Theatre Trust, following competitive interview, to undertake the work as recommended by the Arts Lottery. They began work in December 1997.

The team appointed and led by Positive Solutions, was as follows:

Paul Iles	Project Leader
Peter Booth	Project Manager/consultant
Jane Taylor	Consultant
Tony Flynn	Accountant

This team of individual consultants was joined by a number of external companies and practices to undertake specific aspects of the work:

Law & Dunbar-Nasmith	architects
Davis, Langton & Everest	surveyors
Full Circle Arts	access consultants
Morris & Hargreaves	marketing consultants

On appointment it had been the intention of the Borough Council that the work to be done by Positive Solutions should re-examine work undertaken to date, redefine such work, and prepare a bid for full Arts Lottery funding - in 'Lottery speak' a Stage 2 study, leading to a full application for Lottery support for the redevelopment. A work-plan and methodology prepared on that basis was discussed between the client and Positive Solutions, and agreed at the first meeting of the Steering Committee⁸ in January 1998.

The Steering Committee was established by the Borough Council to act as the supervisor of the study being undertaken, and to act as a sounding board for the consultants. Its membership included representatives of the Borough, of the Opera House Board and of the Opera House staff; it was chaired by the Leader of the Borough Council.

The Steering Committee met monthly throughout the study period (December 1997 - June 1998) . A 'retreat' for members of the Steering Group, other Board members and officers of the Borough Council was also held.

The approved work-plan was in four phases, described, in summary, as follows:

1. Orientation

This phase consisted of briefing meetings with key players and stakeholders (including theatre staff), a preliminary site inspection by the architects and a review of the previous application to Lottery. The work also included a detailed review of existing documentation (such as the Management Review by A. Stafford) and a review of the marketing operation of the theatre, as well as a considerable amount of desk research, including examination of programmes and policies from other comparable theatres. Contact was made with external organisations (Arts Council, North West Arts Board, Heritage Lottery Fund) and the architectural officer of The Theatres' Trust and representatives of HLF also paid visits to the theatre.

2. Concept and Options Development

This phase included the Access Audit (undertaken by Full Circle Arts and attached to the architectural study), a programme review, a market appraisal and the development of key policy issues through discussion with key artistic partners (such as the Buxton Festival). This was followed by **Options Analysis**, including Focus Groups and a 'creative seminar' for the Board of the theatre, and the staff, were to help lead to the articulation of overall artistic policy.

3. Business Plan development

The development of the outline Business Plan (including marketing and education policies), work by the architect to revise and cost the existing plans.

⁸ A list of members of the Steering Committee appears as an appendix to this report

4. Completion

Completion of the project, including submission of full application to the Arts Lottery for Stage 3 funding.

An integral part of all the work was the Management Audit report (the 'Stafford Report') since it was agreed by all parties that the development of the Draft Business plan provided a format in which the issues raised in that report would be addressed.

In early February, two letters were received by the consultants from the Arts Council Lottery officer, the first of which made clear that the status of the study as commissioned - a Stage 2 study - would be unlikely to resolve the 'serious concerns that were raised by assessor bodies during the assessment of the original application about the architectural elements of the scheme'. These concerns had, indeed, already been articulated by the study's own architects (Law & Dunbar-Nasmith) and the Steering Committee for the project concluded that the consultants work should be deemed to be a Stage 1 study (a feasibility study), but with as much as possible of the original work proposed in the work-plan remaining intact so that a subsequent bid for Stage 2 funds would be that much easier.

A parallel development encouraged the Steering Committee to think that such an approach would be most productive. Coincident with these developments, the Board of the Opera House was advised of the retirement of the current Theatre Manager from September 1998, and the Board, having agreed a new job description and person specification drafted by the consultants, determined to proceed to appointment as soon as possible. The Board of the theatre, and the Steering Group, felt that the more advanced the study was, the easier it would be for the new Theatre Director, once in post, to take forward a Stage 2 Lottery study (assuming that the present study was accepted by the Arts Lottery as the basis for such further work), as well as proceeding to implement the Action Plan being devised by the Board to take forward the Stafford report's recommendations.

The Steering Committee agreed that the work-plan for the study should remain as originally agreed, though with the target for the work being:

- a) the preparation of a bid for Stage 2 Lottery funding - an Appendix to this report sets out the requirements of such a bid which have informed the development of this draft Business Plan;
- b) the development of the draft Business Plan both as an accompaniment to the application, and as a tool for the new Theatre Director once in post.

4. EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENTS AND CONTEXT

Like any theatre, Buxton Opera House is influenced by its environment - cultural, political and social. In this section we examine some of the external issues of relevance to Buxton which have impacted on the development of the Business Plan, and which may impact on the operation of the organisation over the coming years.

4.1 The National Lottery

The Buxton Opera House was refurbished in 1979 after a long period of use as a cinema: the funds for this refurbishment (which cost c.£1.5 million at today's prices) were raised entirely through the efforts of enthusiasts within Buxton, together with the generous support of the Borough Council, and that volunteer spirit which characterised the redevelopment programme is still an important aspect of the Opera House's culture today.

Inevitably, after almost 20 years of extensive use, the theatre is in need of substantial up-grading to meet modern expectations of audiences and artists as well as staff, up-grading to meet contemporary access requirements, and a number of structural problems have additionally been identified which require attention. The building is also deficient in relation to matters concerned with Health and Safety legislation.

There are severe deficiencies in a number of important areas, including the shortage of social space - bars, foyers, etc., as well, for example, as major obstacles in terms of access for people with disabilities.

For some time, therefore, the Council, as freeholders, together with the Theatre's Board, have been planning a further major redevelopment to bring the house up to 21st Century standards, recognising the importance of the building culturally, socially, environmentally and historically (it is a Grade 2* listed building).

A first application to the Arts Council of England for National Lottery funding resulted in the award by the Arts Council of a grant to undertake further development work, and in particular for the development of a Feasibility Study of which this Business Plan forms a part.

Since the original application was submitted in March 1996, a number of important changes have taken place within the 'Lottery regime'; these can be summarised as follows:

- the Lottery has moved to a three-stage process from a two-stage process which is more demanding of applicants to deal, at each stage, with the relevant criteria established by the Lottery Board
- funds for larger-scale projects have become increasingly tight as competition for funds has increased; this situation is likely to become more acute as the 'sixth good cause' becomes established by Government, and as the emphasis on local scale activities is encouraged by Government

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- the Arts Council and the regional arts boards are becoming more strategic in their thinking about Lottery applications: rather than being responsive to each application in isolation, the Council and the boards are now encouraged by Government to relate each application to pre-agreed strategies. This is an important consideration for Buxton given the importance which North West Arts Board potentially sees for the Opera House as an important strategic venue.

4.2 European Funding

Buxton is surrounded by a European Objective 5(b) area, a European Community scheme for the investment of Structural Funds within rural areas, and designed to assist with projects which diversify the local economy.

Advice from Derbyshire County Council Members and from their European office was offered, which indicated that, unfortunately, the town itself (and therefore the Opera House) is not within the potential area of benefit for European funding towards the capital redevelopment programme. However, it may be possible in the future to access funds from this source towards particular programmes which are targeted by the Opera House at the rural hinterland.

4.3 The Arts Council of England

Buxton Opera House has not historically been in receipt of regular funding from the Arts Council towards its revenue programme, though the Buxton Festival - a regular feature of the Opera House summer programme - received project support from the Arts Council from 1992 - 1997.

The Arts Council is, though, concerned to ensure that the Opera House becomes firmly established on the middle-scale touring circuit, and it may be that funds towards the development of the marketing of the theatre will in future be available.

It will be important for the new Theatre Director to explore with the Arts Council all possible avenues to opening up the Council's resources to Buxton though, realistically, this will never be towards significant ongoing revenue support (since such support has never, so far, been offered by the Arts Council for touring houses) but may be possible in a number of areas of project support or venue development.

4.4 North West Arts Board

North West Arts Board is the arts funding and development agency for the north west of England - including the High Peak district. Funded primarily by the Arts Council, the Board has assumed increasing responsibilities during past years, and it will be essential for the Buxton Opera House to develop closer working relationships with relevant officers of the Board in the future - particularly if, as anticipated, Central Government places further responsibility on the Regional Arts Boards over the coming years.

Those increases in the Board's responsibility include specific responsibilities with respect to the National Lottery, for touring development on a regional basis and for education and community-related work - all of them relevant to the Opera House. The Board runs a number of specific annual or ongoing schemes for financial support; Buxton Opera House will seek every opportunity to bring regional resources from the Board into the High Peak.

The financial section of this Business Plan makes a number of assumptions about increased support to the Buxton Opera House once the redevelopment has taken place: these have been included on the basis of the advice given to us by NWAB officers that Buxton 'represents a potentially important strategic client' for NWAB.

4.5 The 'Stafford' Report

As noted earlier in this Report the grant given to Buxton to help it re-submit its Lottery application coincided with the commissioning, with support from the Arts Council Touring Department, of a management review of the Opera House from Arthur Stafford.

The "Stafford Report", as it came to be known was formally received by the Theatre Trust in the spring of 1998 and the issues raised in the report have formed an important backdrop to the work of the consultants in preparing this Business Plan.

The Board of the Opera House has accepted the basic themes in the Stafford Report - and action has already been taken on many of them. It must though be noted that, with advice from the consultants, they have not necessarily approved in detail all the recommendations made in the Report.

An Appendix to this Business Plan sets out, as a pro forma, all the recommendations made by Stafford, together with a note of the decisions taken by the Board in their response to the Report: it will be noted that discussion in respect of a number of matters is still ongoing and will await the appointment of the new Theatre Director (see below).

Key decisions already taken by the Board include the following:

- to appoint, as a replacement to the existing Theatre Manager who retires in the autumn of 1998, a Theatre Director on a job description approved by the Arts Council and NWAB
- to undertake a Board skills audit with a view to identifying the kind of new skills needed by the Board and to consider, with advice from North West Business in the Arts, the institution of a Development Programme for the Board
- to involve staff at the Opera House in the development of the Business Plan and subsequent Lottery application.

The Stafford Report is acknowledged by the Board (and indeed by High Peak Borough Council) as a useful tool in considering issues which have been further refined and developed on advice from the consultants undertaking the current Business Plan.

4.6 High Peak Borough Council

High Peak Borough Council is the owner of the freehold of the Buxton Opera House and provides annual grant aid to its programme. Direct financial support is also provided through payment by the Council of insurance premiums and through the repairs and renewals allocation it makes each year to the theatre. It provides, in addition, substantial 'in kind' assistance to the House through its various technical departments.

The Opera House therefore sits at the centre of the Council's policies for the arts which have recently been the subject of an extensive consultation across the District. A full copy of the Strategy report which has emerged from this consultation is attached as an appendix to this report.

Based on a vision which expresses the Borough Council's broad objectives as being

to open up more opportunity for more people to enjoy and participate in the arts

the Council sees its role primarily as an enabler, 'helping to maintain and develop the infrastructure - both physical and organisational - which supports the rich diversity of provision for the arts in the High Peak'.

In respect of the Opera House, the Strategy notes that it is 'an important local and community facility (which attracts) audiences from a wide circle outside the High Peak area for whom the quality and variety of product is crucial if they are to return again and again. There is much anecdotal evidence that audiences come as much for the quality of the building itself and its surroundings as for the artistic content of programmes'.

'For this reason' the report Strategy continues 'the Council attaches great importance to maintaining the architectural and historic quality of the building itself and its immediate surrounds'.

The specific policy laid down in the strategy for the Opera House is as follows:

To promote Buxton Opera House as one of England's finest theatres, set in the heart of the rural Peak District, which will:

*provide for the cultural needs of all
be beautifully conserved
work for the benefit of the local community.*

5. OPERATIONS AND PLANS

5.1 Artistic Programme

Within our overall objective to provide a service to the High Peak community, Buxton Opera House is a touring theatre which exists to present shows initiated in the commercial and private sector of the theatre industry. We aim to sell as many tickets as possible. This is a disarmingly simple proposition. We exist to take risks, to provide continuity of theatrical experience, and to give life to a popular theatrical culture that has been in existence for 500 years.

***The art of popular theatre is a permanent revolution*⁹**

The artistic programme of Buxton Opera House is diverse, pluralistic and populist. The work offered is intended to be popular and accessible even if its content is occasionally complex and disturbing.

***'Popular' means a theatre which is intelligible to the broad masses; taking over their own forms of expression and enriching them; adopting and consolidating their standpoint*¹⁰**

Our ambition is to present, consistently, attractions of the very highest standards - in the words of Lilian Baylis, the manager of the Old Vic "to whose inspiration and enthusiasm the success of the Buxton Theatre Festival is largely due"¹¹, to "persuade people of great talent to come to Buxton to do shows which they are passionate to stage". If the Opera House can continue to support that, it will create a fair chance that theatregoers will respond well and in increasing numbers. We must search hard for the shows we want to see on our stage.

The search will aim for a judicious balance between adventure and caution, between known artists and work and unknown artists and work. A high priority is placed on our relationships with British commercial producers and subsidised drama, opera, ballet and dance companies, the Buxton Festival and, occasionally, international companies.

The Opera House will also give high priority to educational work and to attractions for children. The aim is to broaden our access, but to continue to offer productions across all artforms with minimal subsidy: this requires pragmatism, invention, determination and stoicism on the part of the Board of Directors, the Theatre Director, staff and volunteers.

This section of the Business Plan describes how the Opera House plans to fulfil these aspirations. It is a summary of functions and initiatives that will be undertaken by the Opera House in the next three years. The Plan is presented to the Board and to our stakeholders - the High Peak Borough Council, North West Arts Board and the Arts Council of England Touring Department - for their information. This helps them to carry out a detailed appraisal of our artistic policies.

The current programme offers work in most art forms, and has resulted in an annual paid attendance of 110,000 in 1997, an average of 416 theatregoers at each

⁹ Jean Vilar *Theatre as a Public Service* 1953

¹⁰ Bertolt Becht *The Popular and the Realistic* 1938

¹¹ Quoted on plaque at the top of the stairs in the foyer of the Buxton Opera House, unveiled 1939.

performance, or some 50 per cent of capacity. The future artistic policy is to build upon this achievement by refocusing the programme to clarify its identity and image. This involves a redefinition of popular artistic priorities, in order to re-affirm that quality is at the heart of its objectives. But we must do this without seeking to increase the present level of base subsidy of £45,000¹² from High Peak Borough Council.

It will be noted that currently grant-in-aid is £0.36 per seat whereas the average ticket price paid is £9.66 including VAT. Subsidy is presently 3 per cent of turnover. These figures must be kept to the forefront of our artistic planning; this theatre does not enjoy the relative stability and continuity of a resident company, nor the revenue subsidy levels of many other touring theatres.

It is very difficult to take risks without subsidy. We are influenced by market conditions in the theatre profession: at present there is manifestly an over-supply of theatres, particularly many new buildings, in relation to the supply of productions, meaning that there may not be enough good (i.e., popular *and* high quality) productions to fill the grid of British touring theatres on a year round basis.

Our first priority in programming must be to find financially viable attractions for every week of the year. A theatre that is dark is like a factory that stands idle. It brings no contribution to the theatre's overheads. We must, consequently, always be anxious to have a production on the stage, and it must take more at the box-office than the additional costs of the Opera House when it is occupied.

The present financial state of the producing company side of the business means that promoters can hold the whip hand over theatres and the balance lies in their favour when selecting tour itineraries. Nonetheless, the *business* of programming the Opera House must not dominate the *art* of the Opera House. Our commitment to excellence and innovation, coupled with the Trust's authentic theatrical spirit and experience of the *core* business of theatre management gained since 1979, will amount to an organisation led by value driven beliefs, for good productions are the best tool for stimulating interest and attendance.

5.1.1 A Presenting Theatre for the 2000s

There are limitations to the current system of presenting productions, where nearly all work is presented by touring companies and rarely produced by the Opera House itself.

At the moment producing managements do not know where the gaps are in our programme. They do not spend long enough in Buxton to know what the Opera House needs. We are the people who know the area and its audience.

Marketing and education campaigns for one tour happen in several different locations, and resources could often be pooled. Established and successful companies (across all artforms) offer too small a range of productions to offer a readily exploitable continuity of profile.

The responsibility for the commercial success or failure of any touring production rests heavily with our Theatre Director and staff. Our actions are rarely part of any cohesive national plan. The staff of the Opera House believe that they rarely have any influence over the choice of production they have to sell, and we can seldom

¹² Additional financial support offered by the Council includes payment of insurance premiums (£8000 p.a.) and on-going repairs and maintenance (£3000 p.a.) - in addition to substantial in-kind support from Council staff

make a creative contribution. The rigid separation of theatre buildings and theatre production is not a viable infrastructure for the next decade. The system of insecure subsidised repertory theatres and secure touring theatres is disintegrating: the future lies in a mixed economy of subsidy.

We are aware of attempts to establish a more active theatre-producer role - such as *The Touring Partnership* and *The Musicals Alliance* for the No.1 Theatres, but Buxton Opera House is smaller than these theatres and does not have their resources to invest in the big names and substantial production costs which characterise these consortia. We therefore welcome the Arts Council Touring Department's interest in *Network*, an English national consortium of middle-scale theatres, and although we did not host its first production, *Trafford Tanzi*, will aim to participate fully in its evolution, which offers the prospect of a certain reappraisal of the perceptions of building based companies and touring theatres.

The Board has set as a target the development, medium term, of an ongoing relationship with *Network*, recognising that the Opera House will benefit substantially from the evolution of co-operation amongst middle-scale touring theatre managements.

5.1.2 Programming Overview

Our programme is guided by a number of important factors:

- the aspirations of our Mission Statement, especially to stage 'popular' theatre
- the known Buxton Opera House theatregoing market
- the availability of quality attractions
- the size of our stage
- our audience-box-office potential
- the energy and aspirations of the new Theatre Director and staff.

Notwithstanding our good relations with many producing companies, demand for shows from all medium-scale touring theatres exceeds supply and the current shortage of productions on the national circuit must stimulate an even greater active approach to programming. We will work with other theatres and producers to improve our knowledge of advance planning.

The Board will therefore discuss programming objectives with the new Theatre Director. We will continue to contract a "diverse range of productions across all artforms" and, furthermore, will develop new targets for the mix of artforms. The intention will not be to create unnecessary pressure for the Theatre Director. We have no appetite for theatrical snobbery and do not distinguish between the "subsidised" theatre and "commercial" theatre as a barrier between "good and "bad", as some commentators have. Our belief is that all theatre, from the most classical to the most "popular", can and should appeal to the widest spectrum, because the programme can unify a disparate market. Too narrow a programme would be instant death to Buxton Opera House.

We do not programme by committee: arbitration in theatrical choice will lie, as currently, with the Theatre Director, who will be guided by the realities of our past record. At the basic level, our programme mix in the year ending 31 December 1997 was as follows:

Artform	No of Perfs. Staged	Seats Sold	% Capacity	Theatre's Margin Retained	Artform Contrib.	% of Perfs
Ballet	8	3,500	47%	24%	4.4%	3%
Classical Concerts	6	3,680	65%	24%	3.7%	2.4%
Contemp Dance	1	277	29%	20%	0.2%	0.4%
Children & Panto	31	16,661	57%	27%	13.3%	12.2%
Other Dance	10	2,614	28%	16%	1.9%	3.9%
Drama	81	17,184	23%	14%	8.2%	31.8%
Folk and Jazz	5	2,602	56%	24%	2.7%	2.0%
Light Entertain	41	21,729	55%	23%	23.8%	16.1%
Music Theatre	43	20,563	51%	28%	23.4%	16.9%
Opera	29	20,368	75%	15%	18.6%	11.4%
Hires	6					
Totals	261	109,178	45%¹³	21%	100.0%	100.0%

This chart will enable the new Theatre Director to demonstrate how she/he will intend to change and develop the Opera House, and to show how a renewed identity is imprinted on the artistic programme.

¹³ The overall percentages quoted in the report vary slightly, as some statistics collected by the theatre include, and others exclude, ticket sales made directly by hirers

5.1.3 Buxton Festival

The Opera House is the main locale for Buxton Festival, staged for two weeks each July. The Festival is an independent company and is to appoint a new Artistic Director for the 21st Festival in 1999. (A new General Manager was appointed in June 1998). Rare operatic repertoire is likely to be resumed. The Festival would, ideally, like to engage Opera North, or a company of similar standing, for a summer residency. It is crucial for the Opera House that the Buxton Festival is a flourishing part of our summer seasons: the Trust is therefore working closely with it to determine ways of future collaboration, such as shared administrative, technical, finance, marketing and education support, leading to joint synergism and efficiencies. This Business Plan does not examine these opportunities in detail: this will be the subject of investigation by the Opera House Theatre Director and Festival Director and General Manager once appointed.

5.1.4 International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival *and* Musicals Festival

***The Gilbert and Sullivan tradition is a stylish and entertaining national treasure.*¹⁴**

In 1998 we will host the 5th International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival: this is the world's largest G&S festival. Each year this festival includes three fully-staged professional productions over eighteen days by the Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company, with accompanying lectures, workshops, a Big Sing and Costume Parade, and cabaret and late-night club. This year's programme also includes a children's production.

This is promoted in July-August, followed by a two week International Music Theatre Festival at the Opera House: this features nightly performances by leading amateur societies, a 200 strong Northern Musical Theatre Choir with guest appearances by professional stars of musicals. The Opera House will also target the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company for tours to Buxton: the company has been producing its best work in decades, though we realise that there is little likelihood of seasons here until the Arts Council offer the Company a revenue grant.

5.1.5 Drama

***The more we're bombarded by the electronic media, the more we'll crave a theatre where words matter.*¹⁵**

Although the Opera House stage and audience capacity is suited to large scale drama, there have been few opportunities for our theatregoers to experience the new wave of contemporary playwrights and big classical work. In drama, there is a shortage of quality work on the circuit.

¹⁴ Raymond Gubbay, *The Times*, 10 June 1998

¹⁵ Benedict Nightingale *The Future of Theatre* 1998

Unfortunately, we are unlikely to be 'strategically targeted' by the funding system for visits by the Royal National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company, and any demand for their productions to be seen in Buxton is unlikely to be met, unless a commercial management presenting their work uses this theatre as a "fill-in" date. For this reason it is often unwise to confirm too much of the programme too far in advance, leaving sufficient gaps in the scheduling. There are other factors which the Theatre Director will juggle, such as different planning cycles between artforms, and the desirability of gaps to enable account to be taken of results in the early part of a year.

We will renew our acquaintance with the suppliers of quality drama: the Opera House is suitable for middle-scale *and* large-scale plays. We will therefore discuss our potential with some of the other subsidised drama companies, such as Birmingham Repertory Theatre and West Yorkshire Playhouse, whose "stabilisation" programmes include touring, as well as touring theatres which have gone into occasional production or become "key partner venues", such as Bath Theatre Royal and, in future, Network (for middle-scale associations between presenting theatres). We will also emphasise to the funding system that Buxton Opera House is, with the Grand Theatre Blackpool, *one of the two best drama houses for touring drama in the North West region*. Greater Manchester and Merseyside have no touring houses as suitable for plays - the Palace Theatre and Opera House in Manchester (both c. 2000 seats) are too big for the artform, as is the Liverpool Empire Theatre (c.2300 seats) and, if Liverpool Playhouse becomes a touring theatre it will be economically too small for commercial touring (758 seats).

Companies which have performed at Buxton Opera House To be Targeted for return visits¹⁶

- * Compass Theatre Company- Sheffield
- * English Touring Theatre - Crewe
- * Hull Truck Theatre Company
- * Reduced Shakespeare Company
- * Oxford Stage Company
- * Method and Madness
- * Bridge Theatre Company of Hebden Bridge (annual three week - three play repertory season)
- * Middle Ground Theatre Company, Ledbury
- * Millett Drama Company
- * English Shakespeare Company, Newcastle upon Tyne

Companies to be approached/ targeted for performances

- + IOU Theatre -
- * National Youth Theatre
- * Communicado Theatre, Edinburgh
- + Network - consortium of middle-scale theatres
- * Royal National Theatre

¹⁶ In the sections which follow the symbol * indicates potential for one week visits to the theatre, + one-night stands, # part week

-
- * Royal Shakespeare Company
 - * Birmingham Repertory Theatre
 - * West Yorkshire Playhouse
 - * The Touring Partnership
 - * Northern Stage, Newcastle upon Tyne (new touring ensemble, e.g., *Animal Farm*)

5.1.6 Dance

Our aim is to present a range of work that recognises the diversity of dance forms, encourages the staging of innovation, develops educational opportunities and collaborations. We plan to work with our nearest Regional Dance Agency - Cheshire Dance Agency - and seek advice from Dance UK, Dance Umbrella and other presenting theatres such as the Lawrence Battley Theatre, Huddersfield, Manchester Dance House and the Blackpool Grand Theatre who are more experienced in successful promotion of contemporary dance. This is, largely, a new area of programming for the Opera House. We recognise that audience support will only be achieved with a consistent and determined approach.

This is, therefore, a programming strand where we will seek project subsidy from North West Arts Board to part-underwrite the initial risk. We envisage that support of individual dancers/choreographers could be achieved by establishing a Dance Artist in Residence Scheme (to include short training courses and masterclasses): this will be discussed with the new Education Manager when appointed. Overall, the strategy will be to remove barriers to the enjoyment and experience of dance. The wide variety of companies and multiplicity of future programming is reflected in our target list of companies

Companies which have performed at Buxton Opera House

To be Targeted for return visits

- + Adzido African Dance
- + Phoenix Dance Company, Leeds

Companies to be approached/ targeted for performances

- * Rambert Dance Company
- + Richard Alston Dance Company
- + DV8 Physical Theatre
- + Random Dance Company
- + Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company
- + Ludus Dance Company, Lancaster
- + The Featherstonehaughs
- + The Cholmondeleys

-
- + Scottish Dance Theatre, Dundee
 - + CandoCO
 - + Arc Dance Company

5.1.7 Ballet

In general, it is the classical repertoire of the *ballet blanc* which audiences like and which is the hardest to programme. We await with interest the re-birth of The Scottish Ballet, in the hope that its new focus on the medium scale circuit will suit a relationship with the Opera House.

Companies which have performed at Buxton Opera House

To be Targeted for return visits

- * City Ballet, London
- + The European Ballet
- + The Images of Dance Company
- * The Scottish National Ballet (new middle-scale work)
- * Northern Ballet Theatre, Leeds

Companies to be approached/ targeted for performances

- +The Royal Ballet (Dance Bites)
- +English National Ballet (Middle Scale company)

5.1.8 Opera

As with other artforms, the Opera House's ability to programme is affected by the Arts Council. We would like a relationship with Opera North. In addition, we will endeavour to programme other companies in work that goes beyond the standard repertoire or programme companies which present known works in accessible ways, such as Music Theatre London. A relationship with the new European Opera Company of Manchester is beginning to bear fruit, following their launch at Buxton with Mozart's *Lucia Scilla*.

Companies which have performed at Buxton Opera House

To be Targeted for return visits

- # English Touring Opera
- # Clonter Opera Farm Company
- # Opera Theatre Company Dublin (previously within Buxton Festival)
- * European Opera Centre, Manchester
- # Opera Box
- * British Youth Opera Company

-
- * D'Oyly Carte Opera Company
 - * Opera North
 - * City of Birmingham Touring Opera

Companies to be approached/ targeted for performances

- # Music Theatre London
- # Paragon Ensemble, Glasgow

5.1.9 Physical Theatre

For the Opera House, a new and very occasional genre: companies might include

- +David Glass Ensemble
- # Trestle Theatre Co.

5.1.10 Children's Theatre and Pantomime

The Opera House pantomime producing partner is Channel Theatre Company. We will maintain this five-year relationship for the foreseeable future, as well as engaging other companies who specialise in children's theatre.

Companies which have performed at Buxton Opera House

To be Targeted for return visits

- Channel Theatre Company
- *Whirligig Theatre
- *National Youth Music Theatre
- *Playdays Company
- +Peak District Music Centres - annual children's concert
- +Kinder Children's Choir - annual High Peak event

Companies to be approached/ targeted for performances

- *The Singing Kettle World Tour Company, Scotland

5.1.11 Amateur and Community Programming

The Opera House has built positive relationships with several amateur societies and has always welcomed them as a way of expressing our commitment to the High Peak community. Furthermore, we contribute professional back-up through technical and marketing advice in an effort to improve the quality of their productions.

Companies which have performed at Buxton Opera House

To be Targeted for return visits

- * Buxton Drama League
- * Peak Performance Company
- * The Gemmels
- + Bakewell Youth Theatre
- + Buxton Youth Music Theatre
- + Association of American Dancing
- + Buxton Musical Society

5.1.12 Classical Concerts and Recitals

We will continue to use the Opera House as an occasional concert hall for chamber and choral music

Events/ ensembles which have been performed at Buxton Opera House

To be Targeted for return visits

- + Sainsbury's Choir of the Year
- + Manchester Camerata
- + Northern Chamber Orchestra

Companies to be approached/ targeted for performances may include concert performances of opera

5.1.13 Light Entertainment

+Alexis Korner Memorial Concert - annual rhythm and blues concert.

Other one night stands include annual visits by Ken Dodd, Joe Longthorne et. al. We will continue to programme light entertainment and to keep abreast of new artistes from television, clubs and seaside talent quests. The aim is to programme entertainers who offer "*directness, comedy, music, emotion, variety, effect, immediacy and localism.*"¹⁷

5.1.14 Conferences and Symposia

The neighbouring Pavilion Gardens complex is a conspicuously successful conference centre: occasional use of the Opera House auditorium will be offered on a rental basis. The Borough Council marketing of the Winter Gardens includes details about the Opera House. (See also Education Appendix 10, page 7 Conferences).

¹⁷ These are the eight demands and tastes of audiences as defined by John McGrath in *A Good Night Out*, Methuen, London, 1981, pp.77-82.

5.1.15 International Companies

It is hoped that Buxton Festival may become more international in programming; we will establish links with other UK festivals with a view to add-on weeks of foreign companies - especially Belfast Festival at Queens', held in November annually and therefore the most suitable for timing.

5.1.16 Hires, including TV and Filming

The Opera House has, on occasions, been used as a backdrop or location for film and television - we will continue to seek these hires through modest advertisements in trade directories, and through the Borough Council's participation in the East Midlands Screen Commission of which it is a member.

5.1.17 Concluding remarks about Artistic Programme

There never was, and there never will be, an ideally programmed touring theatre. Theatres are too complex and delicate a machine, depending on the harmonious co-operation of too many talents and influences, ever to reach perfection for more than a passing moment. Good theatres at their best periods have been severely criticised, not, as a rule, without reason.

*When the Old Vic goes to Buxton, we should not let our craving for what is ideally desirable render us careless of what is practically desirable as an improvement on existing conditions.*¹⁸

The artistic categories and lists of companies are not offered as a magical recipe, nor as an *instant* solution for the achievement of our programming objectives. They are based on sound artistic and financial principles, and we hope that our programming will develop far beyond the immediate probable or possible companies and artists. These targets give the Trust and stakeholders a healthy impulse to theatrical progress.

5.2 External Factors

Buxton Opera House, as a touring theatre, is part of a network of theatres which make up the sum of many parts, the real 'national theatre' of the UK. As members of the Theatrical Management Association, we will contribute to the evolution of new forms of artistic and managerial alliances, thus aiming to learn about, and contribute to, improvements in professional practices by encouraging training, secondments and benchmarking. We welcome healthy input from outside influences.

¹⁸ Lilian Baylis, quoted in Sybil and Russell Thorndike, *Lilian Baylis*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1938, p.65.

5.3 Education and Outreach Policies

The Opera House has never had in place a formal written education or outreach policy, though we have historically undertaken programmes of work which would fall within such a policy.

We are committed to the development of such policies, and much discussion on matters relating to them has been held during the discussion of the Draft Business Plan: we have, indeed, received a detailed paper (attached as an appendix to this report) which sets out the kind of developments we might envisage, particularly in the area of education policy.

Rather than adopt this detailed paper as it stands, we have concluded that in this important area, it is important for us:

- to be clear about our key objectives
- to undertake such work in partnership with the education sector and with other arts providers in the High Peak

Accordingly we have decided on the following plan of action:

- the adoption of a key objective in this field (see below)
- the appointment, at the earliest date possible, of an Education Officer
- consideration of possible links with the education work of the Buxton Festival
- making it a key task of the new Theatre Director to begin a debate with education providers within the area and with other arts providers in order to develop a mutually agreed policy

The key objective we have set for ourselves are as follows:

- to implement an education and outreach policy, in partnership with external agencies, and in collaboration with theatre hirers, which will help (a) build audiences for the future and (b) place the Opera House at the centre of a wider campaign to ensure that the arts are accessible to as many people as possible within the High Peak - in accordance with the Borough Council's policy objectives

5.4 Contractual Arrangements

Running Buxton Opera House is a high-risk business, even when our standing costs are strictly controlled and minimised. There are many variants of deals between a theatre and producing companies. Dividing box-office income with 70 per cent going to the producer is an industry maxim although the precise share varies considerably from attraction to attraction (and from theatre to theatre).

Modelling in our estimates has been built assuming a variety of deals, but as in the past at Buxton, they are mainly box-office splits, with risk thereby shared between the Opera House and producer (low risk to the Opera House). Often the producing company asks the Opera House for a guaranteed fee that the company would receive irrespective of the level of box-office revenue and on account of their 70 per cent share (high risk to the Opera House). Often royalties are paid to the producing company off-the-top, on behalf of the creative team of author, director, designers and tour-booker. Producing companies are sometimes prepared to translate the guarantee into a first-call on the box-office receipts rather than a guaranteed fee (medium risk to the Opera House).

In this case, when the producing company's stated costs are not achieved, they would be involved in loss. Buxton Opera House, when offering a guarantee or a first call, would have the option of demanding a higher second call on the box office receipts than may be represented by 30 per cent or a sum in excess of the Opera House's standing costs. This would be seen as reward for taking the risk of offering a guarantee or first call. Buxton Opera House achieved a positive margin of 21 per cent in the year ending 31 December 1997. The Opera House has developed a trusting contractual relationship with many producing companies, who are confident of predicting the Opera House potential performance for their attractions.

Notwithstanding the future artistic objectives, the introduction of new production companies to the programme must be achieved with no decline in this annual margin to the Opera House. The Board and management are sensitive of the fact that contractual arrangements vary enormously in British theatres. Many local authorities expect that box office income should *equal* the amount paid to producers: this is not an option for the Trust, for it must operate on its base subsidy of approximately £45,000. Slippage of retention invariably occurs when theatres consistently pay guarantees, because the parties cannot predict success. It is noted that only one or two failures could plunge the Opera House into debt. A "hard nosed" approach from the Theatre Director, with the Board of Directors monitoring deals very carefully, is critical to the operation.

Contractual negotiations also include detailed arrangements for shared marketing expenditure and agreed items to be recharged to producing companies. The consultants have reviewed these details for, until 1998, Buxton Opera House has contracted productions on the standard TMA pro-forma agreement. This "document of control" is central to the successful outcome of arrangements. From autumn 1998, the new Theatre Director will have a revised Buxton agreement to issue to companies. A copy of this is attached as an appendix to the Report.

Once the building development is complete, gross margins on ticket sales will improve by one per cent, reflecting slightly better deals due to increased sales income; better facilities being available to visiting companies; and improvements on the costs recharged to these companies as a result of the improved contractual arrangements per the new standard Opera House contract.

(Target: To achieve a positive margin on box-office income of 22 per cent in the first full year after refurbishment, rising to 23 per cent thereafter. These targets underpin the expenditure figures in the Opera House trading budget.)

6. MARKETING

This section of the Draft Business Plan is the verbatim report of the marketing consultants which set out to audit the existing marketing operation of the Opera House, and make strategic recommendations for the future.

6.1 Marketing Audit & Strategy

The marketing data which follows incorporates a summary of the Marketing Audit undertaken together with an assessment of the implications of the audit for the marketing strategy, followed by proposed objectives and possible strategies through which these objectives can be achieved.

The Marketing Audit is essentially a snapshot of the marketing situation at the point of undertaking the audit . A full copy of the Audit (and of the Qualitative Research undertaken with Focus Groups) is included as Appendices 7 and 8.

6.2 Existing Market

Current Attendances

In 1997, Buxton achieved 109,178 attendances which is an average capacity of 51%.

	BUXTON OPERA HOUSE Attendances 1997
Plays	17,184
Ballet	3,500
Contemporary Dance	277
Opera	20,368
Classical Music	3,680
Light Entertainment	21,729
Music Theatre	20,563
Children's / Pantomime	16,661
Dance	2,614
Folk / jazz	2,602
Total	109,178

Market Penetration

Between one quarter and a third of all attenders come from within the theatre's own postcode area which means that within SK17, the theatre achieves a very high market penetration of around 189% - i.e. well over the 100% norm.

For the remainder of the 30 minute drive time, the theatre achieves a market penetration of around 15%.

Buxton achieves an overall market penetration of around 8% in its wider 45 minute catchment area.

Current Geographic Catchment

The impact of this potential competition is illustrated by the existing geographic catchment of the theatre:

- 77% of attenders come from within a 30 minute drive time, where there is potentially little competition
- a further 13% of attenders come from within a 30- 45 minutes plus drive time
- 10% of attenders come from further afield

6.3 Potential Market

Buxton Opera House has a potential market of 141,000 people within a 30 minute drive time with limited competition. Within a 45 minute drive time, there is a significant potential market of between 1.6 and 3.3 million people dependent on the actual geographic definition of the 45 minute drive-time catchment. The difficulties in defining the 45 minute drive time catchment are detailed below. This wider market is also subject to a severe decay rate as distance from the venue, and significant competition increases, which results in an average market penetration of 8% within the wider 45 minute catchment.

There is limited existing competition within a 30 minute drive time where current data implies that 77% of the audience is drawn from, but significant competition in the wider catchment.

However, even on a cautious decay adjusted estimate of market size, there is still significant market development potential for Buxton, across all its current programme range.

Location

Buxton Opera House's location in the High Peak district means that it shares its wider potential drive time market catchment with some significant centres for population and potentially competing or alternative provision. As with the 45 minute drive time there is some debate over the veracity of the existing definition of the actual 60 minute drive time from Buxton. However, Buxton's location does mean that it shares its catchment with Stockport and Manchester to the North West, Sheffield and Chesterfield to the North East, Stoke on Trent and Newcastle under Lyme to the South West and Derby to the South East.

Competition

There is limited competition within the 30 minute drive time catchment. However, in the 30 - 60 minutes plus catchment which is shared with Stockport, Manchester, Sheffield, Chesterfield, Stoke on Trent, Newcastle under Lyme and Derby, there is significant alternative provision from Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, Contact, Library, Palace, Opera House, Bridgwater Hall, RNCM; Salford's planned Lowry Centre; Sheffield's Crucible and Lyceum Theatres, Staffordshire's New Victoria Theatre and Derby Playhouse.

Competition from the Potteries is set to increase with recent and ongoing refurbishment of the Theatre Royal, Hanley and Victoria Concert Hall, Stoke. The recent closure of the Davenport Theatre in Stockport should reduce the competition from here although Stockport Borough Council are about to undertake a study into potential theatre provision.

Population

Within the 30 minute drive-time there are 141,000 people, of which 116,000 are adults. Within the 45 minute drive time, this increases substantially to between 1.6 and 3.3 million people (1.4 and 2.7m adults) due to the fact that this takes into account the conurbations and urban areas described above. The difference between the 30 and 45 minute catchments is crucial. 77% of existing attenders come from within a 30 minute drive time. A further 13% from within the 30 - 45 minute drive time.

Potential Arts Attendees

The 45 minutes plus drive-time catchment offers a large number of potential arts attenders. However, once Decay analysis is applied, the numbers reduce dramatically. Drive-time decay analysis allows for the decline in propensity to attend as distance from the venue increases; this provides a more realistic and useful estimate of market size, given the significant extent to which Buxton shares its catchment with other major centres of arts provision. We have used ACE site report data as the base for the 45 minute drive time catchment. However, the theatre's staff feel that this data is inaccurate and that the actual 45 minute drive time catchment may be almost half that quoted. The data below should be considered with this in mind. The total potential and decay adjusted market estimates are detailed below. These reveal, that even on the cautious decay adjusted estimate of market size, and even accounting for a reduced 45 minute catchment, there is still significant market development, across its current programme range.

	Potential Attendances		BUXTON OPERA HOUSE Attendances 1997
	Total	Decay adjusted	
Any theatre	2,091,838	167,348	-
Plays	1,264,349	101,148	17,184
Musicals*	*	*	
Variety / Pantomime*	*	*	
Ballet	209,026	16,722	3,500
Contemporary Dance	95,907	7,672	277
Opera	258,235	20,659	20,368
Classical Music	709,230	56,738	3,680
Jazz	261,634	20,930	
Light Entertainment			21,729
Music Theatre			20,563
Children's / Pantomime			16,661
Dance			2,614
Folk / jazz			2,602
Total			109,178

* Data not available

Demographic Profile of The Market

This reveals that the profile of people in the catchment area scores highly on most factors which indicate a high propensity to attend arts events, including:

- 35% of SK postcode area population in Social Grades AB (Upper / Middle class) compared to GB base of 28%
- high proportion of people within 30 minute drive-time having a degree or professional qualification - 22.3% which is an index of 132 against a GB Index of 100

-
- a high index of 4 particular ACORN groups who are known to be high arts attenders for plays, opera and ballet:

Indices of: - 176 for very affluent older couples / families
177 for traditional urban / younger singles
165 for very affluent younger couples / families
165 for rural affluent couples / families

6.4 Current Marketing Approach

The information below relates to the past and present marketing situation at Buxton Opera House. It must be stressed that much of the current situation has arisen as a direct consequence of being under-resourced, particularly in terms of finance, staff and expertise.

Marketing Awareness

There has been little strategic marketing focus from the organisation as a whole. Historically there have been few formal communication procedures relating to marketing and no formal relationship between the Marketing and Box Office departments, although this situation has now been addressed and regular meetings now instigated.

Marketing Strategy

Historically, no formal marketing planning and monitoring system has been operated. Tactical Marketing Schedules are produced for visiting companies but, again, lack of resources has hindered the development of more strategic marketing. The fact that there has not been a written artistic programming policy means that marketing strategies have inevitably been responsive rather than strategic.

Education / Audience Development

There is little audience development or education function within the theatre. Any development work which does take place is promoted by the Marketing Department but this is a responsive rather than proactive role and again means that Buxton is not able to be strategic about audience development e.g. in the long-term building of particular audiences.

Customer Focus

The management and staff at Buxton Opera House place value on customer care although to date this has not been formalised. This is a situation which the theatre is currently addressing through the development of a written Customer Care Policy and the implementation of planned regular training for all staff and front of house volunteers in Customer Care and Disability Awareness.

Staff

The Marketing Department consists of a Marketing Officer, Press and Publicity Officer and part-time assistant. The department achieves a large amount on few resources. However, lack of resources has meant that Buxton has not been able to appoint experienced arts marketing professionals to these positions, a situation which has limited the opportunity for developing a more strategic focus.

Audience Knowledge

Buxton Opera House has Select Ticketings PASS ticket sales and marketing system, albeit a 7 year old version. This system is able to produce fairly sophisticated marketing analyses. However, experience of the marketing capabilities of this system within the organisation is minimal and marketing use of the system is confined to analyses of attendance patterns and geographic origination.

Midlands Arts Marketing are currently undertaking a mapping exercise of the whole region which will enable Buxton both to assess its own market penetration but importantly, to be able to compare it to other venues in the region to see where the cross over is.

There has been no market research, apart from one small survey of drama audiences, undertaken with audiences at the theatre in recent years other than that undertaken for (and by) the Buxton Festival. A significant uplift in the marketing budgets will be necessary to achieve better research, and provision for this is made in the Draft Business Plan.

Pricing

The limited subsidy available to the theatre means that pricing, as with programming, has, to a large extent been determined by the need to generate income. This means that the Opera House has been restricted in their ability to limit price as a barrier to audience development. There are currently three incentive schemes in operation but none of these schemes has achieved their potential as minimal marketing resources, apart from profiles in the season brochures, are devoted to them.

Sales Outlets

Tickets can be purchased through the theatre's own box office and through a network of 21 ticket agents. The efficacy of this network had not been analysed, in terms of the volume and value of tickets sold, by the current marketing department and this analysis has been recommended. This should also take into consideration an assessment of the other non-monetary value such as the use of the outlets as providers of information about Buxton Opera House and any public relations benefits afforded by them. This should be done through in-house analysis and external market research, ideally in the form of mystery shopping by purported potential attenders at the theatre.

External Support

The marketing function at Buxton has traditionally been relatively isolated from networks of marketing support. There are several reasons for this - the geographic location means it falls at the edges of the areas of operation for three of the regional arts marketing consortia - Arts About Manchester, Midlands Arts Marketing and Yorkshire Arts Marketing; limited marketing budgets have hindered involvement and a succession of relatively inexperienced and hard pressed staff have found themselves little able to look beyond the confines of selling the next event. However, the current Marketing Officer is in contact with the regional consortia. The Opera House is currently undertaking a Market Appraisal in conjunction with Midlands Arts Marketing; is in discussion with Arts About Manchester concerning bulk distribution of print and with Yorkshire Arts Marketing about development of Education and Deaf audiences.

Although a member of Heart of England Tourist Board, there has been little contact in terms of marketing support until recently when the theatre has been allocated two questions on an omnibus questionnaire.

Marketing Budget

Historically, the marketing department have not felt fully informed about the total marketing budget and this situation is currently being addressed through the recently appointed new financial controller.

The Marketing Officer does not at any stage have to account for the rationale behind the expenditure or allocations and this is a situation which should be addressed as a more strategic marketing focus and planning system are adopted.

According to estimates for the trading results for nine months to 31 December 1997, the estimated marketing spend is:

	<u>Est. 12</u> <u>Mths. £</u>	<u>% of budget</u>
District Publicity Assistants Wages	7,900)	
District Publicity Assistants Travelling Expenses	5,500)	19.0
Brochures	21,500	30.0
Shows Media Advertising	21,500	30.0
Shows Print & Publicity Material	1,800	2.5
Distribution Costs and mailing	13,200	18.5
Entertaining	100	*
Total	71,500	100%
<u>Less contra income from touring companies</u>		
Show advertising and print contra from incoming Co's	15,800	
Brochure	<u>7,600</u>	
	23,400	
Estimated Budget Allocation	48,100	
<u>Estimated Turnover</u>		
Box Office	885,000	
Total Theatre Turnover	1,180,000	

The Marketing Budget is between 6% and 8% of turnover, dependent on which definition of turnover is used - box office or total.

On either of these bases the marketing budget is low. On a guideline figure of 10% of turnover, it should, based on experience in other similar venues, be in the region of £80,000 - £100,000. It will be particularly important to uplift the marketing operation in the context of the target increase in attendances proposed in the Draft Business Plan, and to ensure, specifically, that maximum advantage is gained from any major programme of capital redevelopment which will, in itself, enhance the attractiveness of the House to its potential markets.

The theatre needs also to undertake an assessment of the marketing spend and output of visiting companies in addition to that undertaken on their behalf by the theatre itself.

Monitoring & Evaluation

There has been minimal formal monitoring of marketing activity previously, although the Marketing Officer is currently assessing sources of information in conjunction with the Box Office. The only evaluation of marketing effectiveness (apart from overall ticket sales) is undertaken internally within the Marketing Department.

6.5 Marketing Tactics

Print

The theatre handles just over 1.1 million pieces of print per annum, made up of:

Leaflets / handbills

Handbills	864,000
Season brochures (5xpa)	210,000
	1,074,000

Posters

A3 posters	30,850
Double crown posters	3,110
Diary posters	1,500
	35,460

Total units of print received 1,109,460

Distribution

Method	Leaflets/handbills	Posters	Total No	% total
Direct Mail	104,802	0	104,802	9%
DPA Distribution	818,198	32,637	850,835	77%
In-house display	108,000	1,270	109,270	10%
Wastage	43,000	1,553	44,553	4%
Total	1,074,000	35,460	1,109,460	100%

Source of Information

An analysis of Sources of Information undertaken in March 1998, across 9 productions, revealed the following analysis of information sources:

Source of information	Seats Sold	
	No.	%
Direct Mail	2382	40%
Handbill / poster	1520	26%)
Season brochure	1012	17%) 43%
Press advertising /editorial	462	8%
Media : Radio / TV	8	*
Word of Mouth	366	6%
Direct contact with Box Office	180	3%
Total	5930	100%

District Publicity Assistant Network

Buxton Opera House employ a network of 7 District Publicity Assistants (DPAs) who distribute over three quarters of a million units of print (77% of all print) to key centres of population within a 25 mile radius, at a cost of around £13,500 per annum, which is just under one-fifth of the total marketing budget; the DPA network represents a significant item of expenditure.

The total equates to a distribution cost of £16.50 per 1000 items distributed. A dedicated arts distribution service such as Leaflet Rack, operated by Arts About Manchester, would distribute the same amount of print for £12 / 1000, a total of £9816, providing a saving of nearly £3,684. However, there are other benefits arising from using the DPA network. The primary benefit is that it offers an extremely flexible service - the DPAs can be called on at very short notice and to distribute small, targeted amounts of print of required. Another possible benefit is any public relations role performed by the DPA network although there is no data to quantify the extent of this role. The role is seen by the Theatre as particularly important in the rural hinterland.

However, the Source of Information analysis suggests that 43% of seats sold arise from handbills/posters and season brochures distributed other than through direct mail. This 43% will be shared between information picked up outside the theatre, and therefore distributed by the DPAs and information picked up in the theatre itself.

If we assume that all of this information was received via DPA distribution, this would equate to the distribution of 818,198 pieces of print from which 46,870 attendances resulted (43% of 109,000 total annual attendance). This equates to the distribution of 17 pieces of print for each seat sold on the basis of this source of information.

The theatre should undertake a radical review of the DPA system to include assessment of the PR benefits accruing from the system together with the roles and responsibilities of the DPAs and the reporting requirements, along with proposals for a regular monitoring and review process.

Direct Mail

The PASS sales and marketing system is one of the earlier versions of this product and contains records of around 60,000- 65,000 patron records, 2,000 group bookers, 1,000 Friends Discount Card holders and 2,500 mailing list requests.

The season brochure is automatically mailed to the 1,000 Friends Discount Card holders and 2,500 mailing list requests.

Despite the age of the system, it is being used relatively effectively and around 1,000 new files are being added per month.

The patron database is currently undergoing a health check and being analysed by Midlands Arts Marketing as part of their Map the Midlands 2 project.

Direct Mail is being used effectively by the theatre. The source code analysis revealed that 40% of all attenders cited direct mail as their source of information. The theatre estimates that 105,000 units of direct mail are sent out per annum, resulting in 43,600 attendances. This equates to 2.4 units of direct mail for each seat sold on the basis of this source of information. Direct mail is an extremely effective medium of promotion for a venue with a significantly rural immediate catchment, such as Buxton.

Advertising

The theatre uses eleven local papers on a rotation basis:

Paper	Frequency
Buxton Advertiser)	weekly colour display
High Peak Courier)	
Buxton Times)	fortnightly
Leek Post)	
Cheadle Post)	
Congleton Chronicle)	
Sandbach Chronicle)	
Biddulph Chronicle)	monthly
Matlock Mercury)	
Macclesfield Community News)	
Poynton Post)	

Free publicity is also offered by a number of local free papers.

The source code analysis undertaken estimated that 8% of attenders cited Press advertising or editorial as their main source of information for their booking. Whilst this is not a significant number, we do know from other research that press coverage is often acts as a preliminary or subsidiary prompt rather than as a main source of information.

Media Coverage

Television and radio coverage was cited as a source of information by less than 0.5% of attenders.

Sales Promotions

Competitions are run with local press and radio.

Direct Marketing

Buxton is to be commended for its adoption of contemporary direct marketing techniques including fax outs and marketing through the World Wide Web.

Fax Outs

Database of 100+ local companies with 50+ employees. Most recent fax achieved 5 group bookings.

A Web Site has been on line for approximately 9 months since June 1997 and is currently being accessed by around 200 people per week and achieving about 3 sales transactions per week via e-mail.

6.6 Strategic Implications

The theatre achieved 109,178 ticket sales in 1997 which at a capacity of 51% means that there is significant scope for increasing the number of attendances.

It puts on a very wide ranging programme, including plays, musicals, pantomime, ballet, contemporary dance, opera, classical music, jazz, light entertainment, music theatre, childrens shows and folk music. This means that it truly is a theatre which offers something for everyone and as such is positioned to be accessible to a wide range of the population.

While the theatre achieves a very high market penetration in its own postcode area, there is room for an increase in penetration in the wider area where the theatre achieves an overall market penetration of around 8%.

The theatre has a core local geographic catchment with 77% of attenders coming from within a 30 minute drive time, where there is potentially little competition. The theatre only draws a further 13% of attenders come from within the 30- 45 minute drive time, so there is scope for widening the geographic catchment.

Buxton Opera House's location in the High Peak district means that there is limited competition within a 30 minute drive time catchment but it shares its potential 60 minute drive time market catchment with some significant centres for population and potentially competing or alternative provision. It is imperative that the theatre considers their programming and makes efforts to work collaboratively with its potential competitors.

The total potential and decay adjusted market estimates for Buxton reveal, that even on the cautious decay adjusted estimate of market size, there is still significant market development for the theatre, across its current programme range.

The current positioning of the theatre is as a 'heritage' theatre-going experience which is made more pleasurable by its location which also offers the potential for an whole day out experience. The key strengths of Buxton Opera House are its location, the traditional, intimate style of theatre and the wide programme range. The main weaknesses of the theatre are the cramped social spaces, inadequate bar and catering and toilet facilities and a lack of awareness of the range of the programme.

The effectiveness of the theatre's marketing has been constrained by the employment of relatively inexperienced staff. A Marketing Department for a venue of this positioning, size and range of programme, needs to be headed up by a senior person who is both strategically focused and experienced.

The theatre needs to address its limited audience knowledge by using the marketing potential of the PASS Box Office Sales system to its full and by implementing an ongoing programme of market research. This would also inform both development and monitoring of the marketing strategy. This limited knowledge of audiences also prevents the theatre from being able to benefit fully from segmentation of its potential markets. This will require increased resources and training.

The lack of information on the efficacy of the ticket agency network is should be addressed by an assessment of the volume of ticket sales achieved through these and other benefits accruing, including any possible publicity and public relations benefits gained through these outlets.

To address its relative isolation from networks of marketing support, the theatre should explore how it can benefit from greater involvement with the regional Arts Marketing Consortia and Tourism organisations, including Arts About Manchester, Midlands Arts Marketing, Yorkshire Arts Marketing and Heart of England Tourist Board.

The marketing department should be given greater responsibility and accountability for both setting and monitoring the marketing budget. The budget should also be devised in relation to agreed marketing objectives rather than by historical comparison.

The current marketing budget of £71,500 (including £23,400 contra income from touring companies) is on the low side at between 6% and 8% of turnover. A more realistic guideline figure of 10% of turnover should be allocated which would be in the region of £80,000 - £100,000.

The theatre needs to test the effectiveness of its current range of marketing tactics through market research with existing attenders.

Of particular importance to test is the effectiveness of the District Publicity Assistant network as a means of bulk distribution of publicity. At £13,500 to distribute around 140,000 items of publicity this equates to a cost of £96 per 1000 brochures compared to distribution by a dedicated arts distribution service such as that operated by Arts About Manchester would distribute same amount of print for £12 / 1000, providing a saving of nearly £12,000. This review should consider the current rationale for using this method of distribution particularly as to what other benefits accrue from this system such as public relations.

To make more effective use of Direct Mail, the theatre needs to make fuller use of the PASS system, particularly by ensuring that all product is given an event type code to enable finely targeted direct mail.

The effectiveness of current media advertising needs to be investigated through market research with current attenders and the opportunities for increasing awareness with potential attenders through media advertising assessed through market research with potential attenders.

The theatre's adoption of contemporary direct marketing techniques including fax outs and marketing through the World Wide Web should be continued.

6.7 Marketing Objectives

6.7.1 Corporate Vision, Mission & Objectives

The marketing strategy must descend directly from the corporate vision, mission, philosophy and objectives.

6.7.2 Marketing Objectives

Objective 1) To increase attendances by 11 % over four years

This equates to 12,475 attendances over this period.

	1997	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	Total
Attendances	109,178	111,362	113,589	119,268	121,653	121,653
% Increase	-	2%	2%	5%	2%	11%
Increase No. pre annum	-	2184	2227	5679	2385	12,475
Increase No. per week	-	42	43	109	46	240

To be achieved by:

Increasing market penetration from an average of 8% overall to an average of 10% overall by attracting new attenders from a wider geographic catchment

Increasing frequency of attendance of attenders at particular artforms
(Actual nos./ artforms to be specified in consultation with Buxton Opera House)

Increase number of young people attending

We do not have a baseline figure for the number of young people attending on which to set a target increase, but would advise that this be adopted as an objective with an early commitment to market research with current attenders through which the theatre can identify the number of young people attending and consequently set a specific target. The categories which should be identified include pre-school, 5-7; 7-11; 11-16; 16-18; 18-25.

Increase the number of disabled people attending

Post-refurbishment, the theatre will be more accessible to disabled people and consequently more able to attract them to the theatre. As with young people we do not have a baseline figure on which to set a specific target.

Increase the numbers of families attending

Objective 2) Develop Profile of Buxton Opera House

Post-refurbishment, the theatre will be able to increase its profile as a place offering a wide ranging programme with something for everyone and the assurance of a quality, invigorating experience.

The profile of the theatre can also be developed by increased emphasis on promoting the whole experience of a trip to Buxton vs. a city centre theatre going experience in terms of relatively easy, free and safe parking, proximity of other leisure facilities and activities and a pleasant surrounding environment.

Objective 3) Widen awareness of Buxton Opera House

The theatre should increase awareness of the venue in the wider 30 minute drive-time catchment area, outside SK17. Particularly in:

- a) SK2-16 which currently accounts for 26% of ticket sales and we suggest that this increases by 1% in year 1, which is an increase of 284 attendances. This information is based on a postcode analysis undertaken prior to postcode boundary changes. This means that this catchment should also now include the new postcode areas of SK22 and SK23, which replaced some sections of SK12.
- b) DE3-6, 21-22, 45,55,56 which currently accounts for 21% of ticket sales and we suggest that this also could increase by 1%, which is an increase of 230 attendances.
- c) ST1-15, which currently accounts for 10% of ticket sales and we suggest that this also could increase by 1% in year 1, which is an increase of 109 attendances.
- d) S30 which accounts for 4% of current ticket sales, could also increase by 1%, which is an increase of 24 attendances.

Objective 4) Adoption of Strategic Marketing Focus by Organisation

The theatre needs to become strategically marketing focused to enable its marketing to be fully effective for the organisation.

Strategies:

Marketing awareness-raising training throughout the organisation, including the Board, as well as Management Strategic marketing training for Marketing Officer .

Creation of a senior marketing post and appointment of a person with strategic marketing focus and experience.

Provision is made in the outline Budgets for such a post.

Adoption of formal marketing planning monitoring systems, including an ongoing programme of market research, which are reviewed at senior management and board level.

Ensure there is a formal role and position within the organisation for audience development and education and that there is a strategic relationship between this function and marketing.

Objective 5) Development and Implementation of Customer Care Policy

The theatre needs to develop a customer care policy and place joint responsibility for this with both the Marketing and Front of House departments.

Strategies:

Policy development

Disability awareness training for all staff coming into contact with the public, particularly Front of House Staff.

Implement a rolling annual programme of market research to gather audience data.

Objective 6) Assess Effectiveness of Marketing Tactics

Buxton Opera House should assess the effectiveness of all its current marketing tactics and this should then be done on an ongoing basis through the Ticket Sales system and primary market research and the results used to inform the marketing strategy. Areas of particular importance are the DPA distribution system and the ticket agents.

Objective 7) Develop Collaborative Marketing Opportunities

Continue to develop links with external organisations who offer collaborative art marketing opportunities including Midlands Arts Marketing, Arts About Manchester, Yorkshire Arts Marketing and Heart of England Tourist Board.

6.8 Marketing Strategies

The following strategies are suggested to achieve these objectives:

6.8.1 Product

Artistic Programme

The theatre to continue to offer wide range of programme and to emphasis this positioning for which does not appear to be currently widely known.

Education programme

Development of education programme which has a direct audience development remit.

Building

Refurbishment of the theatre to provide a more comfortable and inspiring experience through provision of more circulation and promenading space; more comfortable social spaces, better access for disabled people, improved toilet facilities; better bar and catering facilities.

6.8.2 People

Marketing awareness raising training throughout the organisation, including Board and Management Strategic marketing training for Marketing Officer.

Creation of a senior marketing post and appointment of a person with strategic marketing focus and experience. Increase in salary for Marketing Manager position of £5000 per annum, to achieve this.

Ensure there is a formal role within the organisation for audience development and education and that there is a strategic relationship between this function and marketing.

Customer care policy to be made joint responsibility of both the Marketing and Front of House departments.

Disability awareness training for all staff coming into contact with the public, particularly Front of House Staff.

6.8.3 Process

Adoption of formal marketing planning and monitoring systems, including an ongoing programme of market research, which are reviewed at senior management and board level.

Development of a customer care policy and placing joint responsibility for this with both the Marketing and Front of House departments.

Increase marketing use of Ticket Sales system.

Implement a rolling annual programme of market research to gather audience data and review the effectiveness of marketing tactics.

Undertake a formal review of both the DPA distribution system and the ticket agency network.

6.8.4 Publicity

The profile of the theatre can also be developed by increased emphasis on promoting the whole experience of a trip to Buxton vs. a town centre theatre going experience in terms of easy, free, safe (relatively) parking, proximity of other leisure facilities and activities and a pleasant surrounding environment.

Increase media coverage in SK2-16, SK22 -23, DE3-6, 21-22, 45,55,56 and S30

Increase emphasis on collaborative marketing through regional Arts Marketing Consortia and Agencies including Midlands Arts Marketing with whom the theatre has a historically supportive relationship; West Yorkshire Arts Marketing; Arts About Manchester and SAMCO - Staffordshire Arts Marketing Consortium.

Print

Consistent print production cycles
Increase print lead times
Increase print runs (need to specify amounts)
Wider distribution

Print to promote generic positioning of Buxton Opera House as well as what is on.

Press and Public Relations

Recognise the importance of the Board, the local authority and the volunteers as 'champions' of the theatre.

Continue to foster press and public relations throughout re-development

Promote ideas on developing local columns about programme - involve local people through competitions - as critics / reviewers

Local schools targeted with Young Critic competitions

Relaunch

Keep existing attenders informed
Build databases of potential attenders for relaunch
Develop relaunch strategy

6.8.5 Monitoring & Control

Effective monitoring and control programmes need to be introduced, including:

Programme of rolling primary Market Research

Including:

Annual market research allocation in budget

Rolling programme of quantitative research with current attenders

Regular (to be defined) programme of quantitative and qualitative research into potential attenders

Develop ongoing, self-completion audience monitoring form which is capable of being analysed in-house

Increased Use of Marketing Potential of PASS System

Greater analysis of sales patterns, particularly by event type

Investigation of Pass System possibilities / upgrade potential

Box Office staff to be trained in marketing / reporting functions of PASS system

Implementation of Systems for Monitoring Marketing Effectiveness

To be achieved through regular management review.

Budgets

The Budgets presented in Section 6 of this report include allowance for a significant expansion in marketing spending, and an allowance is also made for ongoing monitoring and research. It will also be noted that the Lottery will, in due course, be willing to offer specific funds towards legitimate marketing expenses incurred as part of the re-start after redevelopment.

7. BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Buxton Opera House is controlled by a Board of Directors, currently numbering eleven, of whom three are appointed by High Peak Borough Council. The Board understands its responsibilities as the legal guardian of all the affairs of the theatre, and will be taking steps over the coming months to re-evaluate these duties in the light, for example, of the Scottish Arts Council's standard work of reference on this subject.

The membership of the Board has a broad range of specialist knowledge and interest; the professional interests of Directors have been summarised by the Board as follows:

business experience	7
trade union experience	5
marketing	4
legal	1
personnel	7
education	4
events management	5
venue management	3
accountancy/finance	7
publishing	2
arts development	3
local government	5

In addition, the Board has access to professional staff from the Borough Council on a *gratis* basis in the fields of, inter alia, building conservation, finance, legal matters.

In considering its membership in response to the Stafford Report, the Board has agreed to undertake an audit of its current skills and to identify gaps in its skill base. Preliminary thinking indicates that the Board needs to have within it a greater number of people with direct current experience of the professional arts business, and it will actively be seeking to recruit on this basis over the coming months. The skills audit will be conducted internally by the Board, on advice from North West Business in the Arts.

In addition, and also in consultation with NWBiA, the Board is to institute a Board Development Programme aimed at increasing and enhancing the Board's skills.

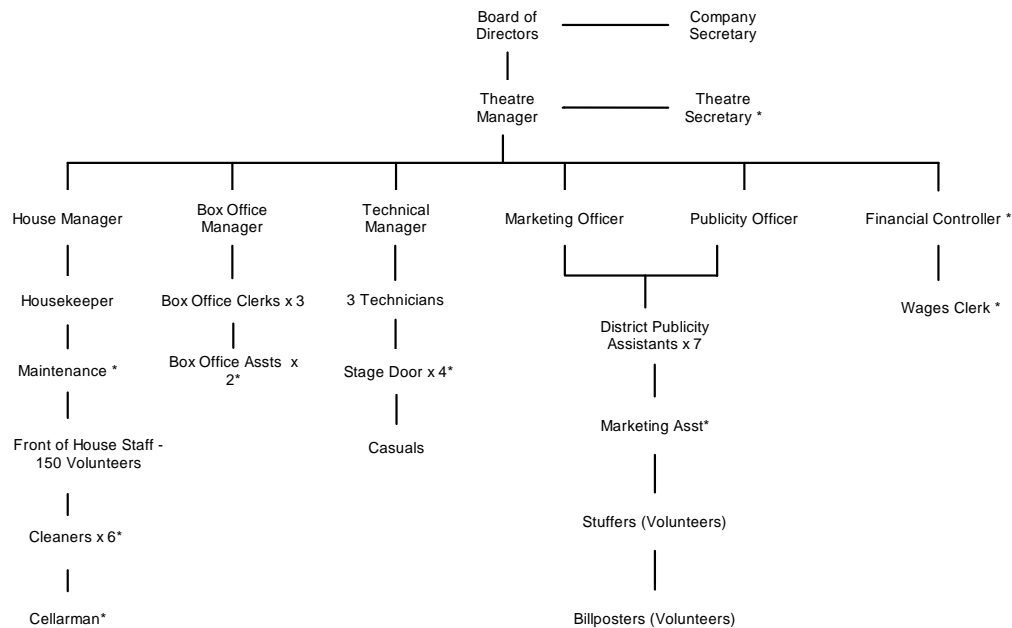
The Board is serviced by its Honorary Secretary, the Chief Executive of High Peak Borough Council. This arrangement provides excellent value for money for the Trust.

The Board holds scheduled meetings 4 times each year, with a small Executive Sub-Committee meeting more frequently. The Board is currently discussing whether it should meet more frequently, particularly at a time of change for the organisation, and more specifically if the Board has, in the near future, to manage an extensive capital programme.

8. MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING (INCLUDING VOLUNTEERS)

***One must never under-rate the importance in the theatre of the machinery of organisation and staff. Think not of plans but of persons.*¹⁹**

Buxton Opera House is managed with a full-time staff of 13, a part-time staff of 24 and with volunteer front-of-house staffing from a pool of 150 theatre supporters. (See Present Organisation Chart hereunder). Our greatest strength is our staff: the building is nothing without their dedication.



* indicates part-time position

During the Stage One Lottery consultancy, and in the light of the Stafford Management Audit, the Board of Directors reviewed the future direction and management of the Opera House and has adopted a new job description and person specification for a new senior position of Theatre Director.

Our long-serving Theatre Manager, Judith Christian, has agreed to retire in September 1998, and the newly defined post has been advertised and, after short-listing and interviews, it is planned that this position be occupied as soon as possible. The job description lists artistic, sales and marketing, board duties, general management and public duties. It gives priority to artistic management of the Opera House, in particular. A full copy is given as an appendix.²⁰

¹⁹ Harley Granville Barker *The Exemplary Theatre* 1922

²⁰ At the time of writing the post of Theatre Director is being readvertised

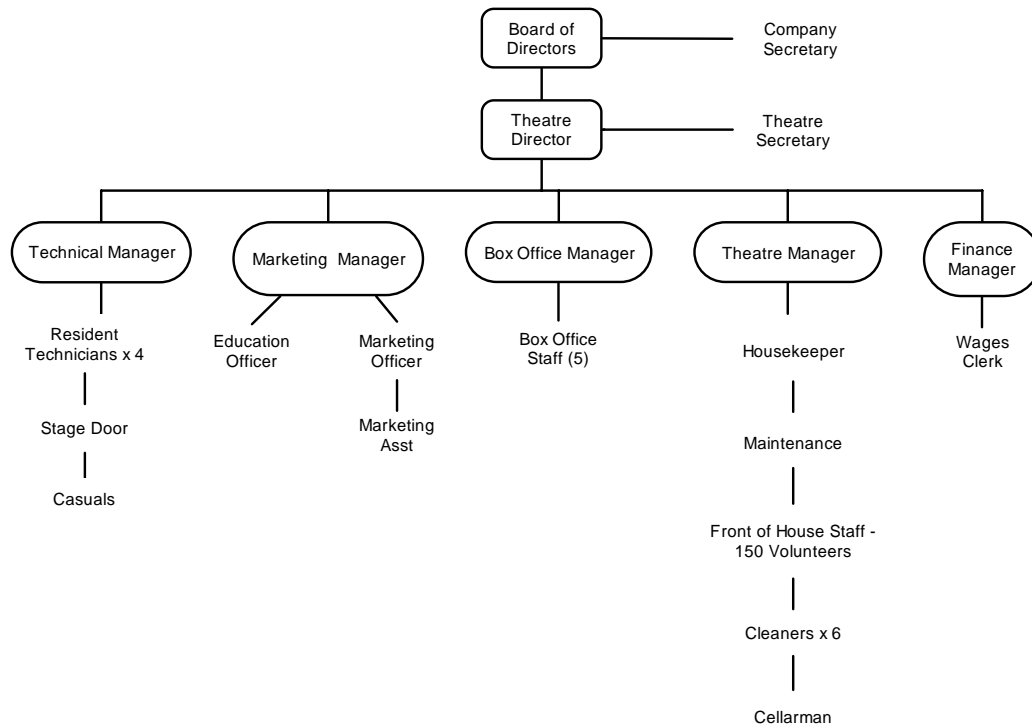
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- Communication of a clear vision of the Trust's artistic future internally and externally
 - Development of the vision and necessity for overall policy leadership
 - Finding the programme and negotiating terms for all contracts, including research of possible visiting productions by visiting attractions and exchanging information with other arts providers
 - Liaison with incoming companies to ensure that long-term relationships are continued and initiated, in order to develop strategic approaches to marketing, education and outreach work
 - Contribution to the High Peak Borough Council Arts Strategy

The title change from 'Theatre Manager' to 'Theatre Director' reflects the greater activity of the job. The Theatre Director will be the arbiter of quality in productions, the main motivator of staff and our main impetus for achieving success.

In order to support this new role, the Board will, in full consultation with the new Theatre Director, re-organise the approach to inter-manager relationships, by forming a senior management team which covers the main areas of the Opera House management. This will not undermine the harmonious and friendly way in which staff carry out their duties: the intention is not to create a bureaucracy, but to clarify the jobs. Our management structure has been that of a traditional touring theatre, but we recognise the need to change, so as to give greater priority to marketing, finance and education and also to access. The senior management team (comprising Technical Manager, Marketing Manager, Theatre Manager, Box Office Manager and Finance Manager) will not only support the Theatre Director but give the Board greater continuity if and when the Theatre Director moves on.

All members of the Management Team will meet weekly with the Theatre Director and contribute to strategy as well as day-today management issues.

The new organisation structure is illustrated in the chart which follows.



The Opera House will be managed with a full-time staff of 16 (3 more than at present), a part-time staff of 22 (two fewer than at present) and the continuation of volunteer staff. The plan envisages two new full time appointments (Theatre Director and Marketing Manager), and a part-time (at least) Education post. Both of the full time posts have already been approved by the Board.

Importantly, the structure proposed (which will require review on the appointment of the new Theatre Director) sets out a clear management structure - with 'heads of department' clearly responsible (and paid accordingly) for the management of their departments.

The Theatre Director will also put in place a departmental review structure which identifies staff needs and training and a planning and meeting structure. The aims will be to:

- to improve further the ways in which all staff develop individually and within their teams
- to develop further the staff expertise and role in developing and training others, especially in anticipation of the requirements to support our new education programmes
- to improve our equal opportunities practice
- to improve the conditions of work and seek ways to improve the comparability of salaries to other theatres
- to improve the sharing of information and planning

-
- to tackle working conditions at the theatre (which will be substantially improved by the architectural proposals submitted as part of this report) and increase the enjoyment of working at the Buxton Opera House

The Theatre Director will also consider new strategies for staff development, including Appraisal, Training, Sharing Information and Planning, Conditions of Work and Salaries, and ensure that all staff have contracts of employment.

9. BUILDING DEVELOPMENT

The architects appointed as part of the study team - Law & Dunbar-Nasmith - identify a number of problems associated with the building, and the objectives set for the architectural team by the Steering Committee reflected these problems. They can be summarised as follows:

- accessibility for disabled customers, artists and staff
- limited foyer and bar space, and inadequate toilet provision
- the spread of office staff throughout the building, and the poor quality of much of the staff accommodation
- the auditorium seating which is both uncomfortable and dangerous
- the lack of suitable dressing room accommodation, with, additionally, no showers for artists
- dangerous back stage get-in
- problems with Mechanical and Electrical services
- a number of structural issues have also been identified

The architects' approach has been to respect the environment of this important listed building, whilst presenting a set of linked proposals which - within the constraints necessarily imposed by the nature of the building - seek to deal with the major issues identified above.

Of particular importance to the Draft Business Plan is the way in which the architects' proposals reflect the imperatives of the Plan in a number of important respects:

- improving the accessibility of the building for disabled people as part of the commitment to ensure that the building is accessible (in its widest sense) to a broad section of the community
- improving the accommodations for staff to ensure greater efficiency
- improving public circulation areas and auditorium comfort in order to make the building as attractive as possible to potential customers
- improving mechanical services to ensure more effective use of energy
- improving bar and other potential retail spaces in order to increase earned income

10. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

The Board already has in place an Equal Opportunities Policy. However, we have reviewed this in the light of current practice and legislation and have adopted the following as a revised Policy.

10.1 General Principles

The days when enjoyment of the theatre belonged to a snooty elite is not a heritable issue at Buxton but, even so, the Trust recognises that there is still little ground for complacency when it comes to ensuring that we continue to appeal to as many people as possible to enjoy the work on stage at Buxton Opera House. Overcoming social, cultural, economic and geographic barriers to such enjoyment is as vital today as it was for the Trust in 1979. Access to and participation in the Opera House therefore underscores our policy for Equal Opportunities.

The High Peak Theatre Trust is committed to the elimination of discrimination and the provision of equality of opportunity for all, in employment, training and theatre-going.

The High Peak Theatre Trust aims to ensure that no applicant for employment receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of sex, marital status, age, responsibility for dependants, socio-economic status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation or disability, or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable.

The High Peak Theatre Trust will always endeavour to create an accessible theatre and extend opportunities in theatregoing, training and employment to those groups under represented in the North West.

The High Peak Theatre Trust recognises that working towards equality of opportunity is not additional or marginal in its activities, but central to the efficiency and development of the theatre as an employer and as a provider of quality theatre.

The High Peak Theatre Trust will take positive action, including seeking and delivering adequate resources working towards the implementation of this policy and monitor and evaluate its development.

10.2 Policy Objectives

To identify practices, procedures and customs in all parts of the Opera House life which unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, and replace them with practices and procedures which ensure equality of opportunity.

To establish agreed grievance and disciplinary procedures to protect staff from discriminatory behaviour based on racist, sexist, disablist and other prejudiced attitudes.

To ensure appropriate representative participation in managerial processes.

To adopt and monitor policies and procedures to provide equality of opportunity in the recruitment, selection and promotion of staff.

To provide a suitable environment for theatregoing and working for disabled people.

To develop a marketing strategy which addresses the needs of visiting companies and artists, including ethnic minorities, women and disabled people.

To adopt and monitor an Opera House sales policy which aims to widen access to theatre.

To both take account of the needs, experiences and interests of theatregoers, and to take positive steps to counter stereotyping and prejudice through the development of artistic policy.

To provide adequate and effective support services for staff and visiting company members.

To develop and establish a comprehensive system of monitoring to provide sufficient, accurate and recent data to inform planning and to enhance the process of effective evaluation and review of Opera House programming.

10.3 Implementation Strategies

This policy statement will be included in the Opera House staff handbook and issued to all staff and be displayed on the Stage Door noticeboard. It will also be sent to all applicants for staff vacancies.

Staff development activity which is appropriate to the needs of staff at all levels in implementing an equal opportunities policy will be established.

Equal Opportunities Policy will be an integral aspect of all Opera House planning.

The Theatre Manager (or equivalent senior officer) will oversee the development and implementation of this policy and advise the Board of Directors on changes and amendments as appropriate.

All staff at the Opera House are responsible for implementing equal opportunity policies as they relate to their activities as members of staff.

The Board will consider the detailed recommendations of the Access Report at the earliest opportunity.

11. FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT

11.1 Revenue Budget: Assumptions and Contents

For the purposes of this Draft Business Plan, no assumption has been made about a possible closure period for redevelopment: until a detailed redevelopment plan is drawn up (which is seen as part of the Lottery Stage 2 exercise) it would be impossible to predict precisely the impact of the redevelopment on any particular year's trading. The Budget does though assume that the redevelopment will take place, and assumes notionally that this will happen in the year 2000/01.

This assumption is central to the Budget forecasts - the redeveloped theatre will, uniquely, offer an opportunity (alongside the implementation of the proposed marketing strategy) to significantly increase trading income from tickets, bars and merchandising.

The detail of the budget is based on a number of other important assumptions and these are described in the accompanying notes. Key amongst these are:

- **Staffing:** the Budget assumes the appointment of the Theatre Director (from 1998/99), the Marketing Manager (from 1999/2000)²¹, and a permanent part-time Education Officer (from 2000/2001). The Board has already approved the appointment of the first two posts, but will approve the appointment of the Education Officer when (a) it becomes clear what external funding might be attracted to such a post - here it is assumed that NWAB will wish to support the appointment and (b) when the discussions with Buxton Opera Festival about a possible joint appointment have been concluded
- **Box Office:** as noted the net box office income has been assumed to grow after the redevelopment; the Board believes that the planned growth in income is realistic (if not underestimated) - given the agreement to put in place a new marketing strategy and given, additionally, the added impetus that the redevelopment will give to increased per seat ticket yield. The figures have been grossed up across the whole of each year: the Stage 2 Lottery process will need to examine the detail of these assumptions, in particular working with the theatre to develop particular targets for different kinds of production
- **Grant Income:** the Budget assumes increases in the total grant income available to theatre from a number of sources either on a one-off basis (grants raised in consequence of the redevelopment) or as two/three year commitments, or as long-term uplifts in levels of support.; again, these assumptions will require further testing during the Stage 2 study period

²¹Subsequent to the preparation of these budget sheets the Council of Management has approved the appointment of a Marketing Manager with effect from 1998/99

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- Although all of the figures need to be the subject of a sensitivity analysis - see below - the bottom line indicates at this stage a healthy and growing annual surplus, so long as the fundraising targets are met: this is felt to be a realistic assumption given that current fundraising exceeds the figures included in the proposed budget. The Board have agreed that surpluses so generated should serve a number of functions:
 - to provide (in the years up to the redevelopment) a further contribution to the capital fund
 - to provide additional support towards the development of the artistic programme over and above the projections in this budget
 - to enhance the financial stability and security of the Opera House
 - to allow the building up of a future capital fund towards further work on the building, including repairs and renewals

Bearing in mind these assumptions the following represents the summary income and expenditure from 1997 - 2003.

BUXTON OPERA HOUSE - SUMMARY INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 1997 - 2003

	1997/98	Notes	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
	Est.		Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.
Trading Income							
Box Office (retained)	235561	1	240272	249978	254980	284349	289467
Non-perf. hires	12740	2	18340	18700	19070	19400	19840
Bar/refreshments	47405	3	45900	46350	50980	56080	57200
Merchandise	4018	4	4000	4080	4480	4930	5020
Programmes	9051	5	9000	9270	9548	9834	10130
Contra Charges	107248	6	100000	103000	106090	109272	112550
Bank Interest Rec'd.	9021	7	9000	9000	9000	9000	9000
One off prog. costs		8					
Other closure costs		9					
	425044		426512	440378	454148	492865	503207
Less Expenses							
Salaries & Wages	280443	10	288000	309230	323484	338684	341268
Administration Costs	58512	11	58500	59085	59675	60272	60875
Establishment Costs	50734	12	51000	52530	57783	58360	58943
Marketing & Publicity Costs	71419	13	71500	73645	74381	90000	92500
Re-opening programme costs		14			7500	10000	
Other re-opening costs		15				10000	
Education budget		16			5000	10000	10300
Programme Developm't Budget		17				10000	12000
	461108		469000	494490	527823	587316	575886
Trading Deficit	-36065		-42488	-54112	-73675	-94451	-72679
Grant Support							
High Peak Borough Council	43050	18	44320	45649	45649	49013	52000
Foundation for Sport and Arts		19				5000	
Arts Council of England (a)		20			5000		
Arts Council of England (b)		21			7500		
Arts Council of England (c)		22			5000	10000	10000
North West Arts Board (a)		23			10000	10000	10000
North West Arts Board (b)		24		2000	2000	5000	5000
Derbyshire C.C.		25				10000	
	43050		44320	47649	75149	89013	77000
Net Trading Position	6985	26	1832	-6463	1474	-5438	4321
Fund-raising	35696	27	15000	15000	10000	20000	20000
Balance		28	16382	8537	11474	14562	24321

Budget Notes

1. Box office : the figures here show the retained box office figure and are based on three elements as indicated in the following note:

BUXTON OPERA HOUSE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE BOX OFFICE

	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.
Box Office retained (baseline)	235561	240272	245077	249980	262478	267727
ditto - increased yield			4901	5000	5249	5354
RPI					13622	13386
Increased share margin					3000	3000
Total	235561	240272	249978	254980	284349	289467

2. Non-performance hires : based on existing budget, an increased year on year to reflect potential income from conference hires
3. Bar/refreshments : the budget assumes a significant uplift in the capital spend after the redevelopment partly as a result of increased bar space but also assuming a review of product lines and margins
4. Merchandise : based on a modest year on year uplift to the year of closure with a potential for additional income on re-opening
5. Programmes : based on RPI adjustment
6. Contra charges : based on RPI adjustment
7. Bank interest received : it is assumed that interest rates will remain static
8. One off programming costs : it has been considered prudent at this stage not to include a figure for potential income from specific events and activities associated with the re-opening after redevelopment
9. Other closure costs : given that no decisions will be taken as part of this Stage 1 study with regard to the period of closure necessary for the redevelopment, no figure has been included on this budget line; clearly such figures will need to be developed as part of the Stage 2 Lottery process - noting that such costs are eligible for support from the Lottery
10. Salaries and wages : the following spreadsheet demonstrates the assumptions made in respect of salaries and wages for the period under review

**BUXTON OPERA HOUSE
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE
SALARIES AND WAGES (proposed structure)**

	1997/98	Notes	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
	Est.		Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.	Est.
Theatre Director	22795		26479	31500	31815	32133	32454
Secretary	4200	1	4326	4455	8500	8755	9017
Technical Department							
Technical Manager	13088		13481	13885	14300	14730	15170
Resident Technician	9054		9326	9600	9888	10184	10490
Resident Technician	9054		9326	9600	9888	10184	10490
Resident Technician	4100		4223	4349	4479	4613	4753
Resident Technician	8400		8652	8911	9178	9453	9737
Stage Door	3802		3916	4033	4153	4278	4406
Stage Door	3802		3916	4033	4153	4278	4406
Casuals	0		0	0	0	0	0
Marketing Department							
Marketing Manager	0		0				
Box Office Manager	12465		12839				
Box Office Clerk	7882		8118				
Box Office Clerk	7882		8118				
Box Office Clerk	7882		8118				
Box Office Clerk	3802		3916				
Box Office Clerk	3802		3916				
Marketing Officer	11220		11557				
Press and Publicity Officer	14875		15321				
Marketing Assistant	4620		4759				
DPAs	10120		10424				
Marketing (future total)		2		94016	94957	95906	96865
Theatre Management							
Theatre Manager		3				17000	17510
House Manager	12465	3	12839	13224	13620		
Housekeeper	8871		9137	9411	3131	7490	10283
Maintenance	1498		1543	1589	1636	3000	3090
Senior Cleaner	1493		1538	1589	1604	1620	1637
Cleaner	3630		3739	3941	3980	4020	4060
Cleaner	3630		3739	3941	3980	4020	4060
Cleaner	3630		3739	3941	3980	4020	4060
Cleaner	1435	4	1478	3941	3980	4020	4060
Cleaner	1435		1478	1492	1507	1522	1538
Casuals/cellar	400	5	412	1000	1000	1500	2000
Education Department							
Education Officer	0	6	0	0	7000	7210	7426
Finance Department							
Financial Controller	8000		8240	8487	8741	9004	9274
Wages Clerk	4575		4712	4853	4901	4950	5000

Overtime	66536		65475	67439	68113	68794	69482
Provision sh/tm redund'ies		7					
Provision for uplifts		8			5000	5000	0
Recruitment		9				1000	
Total	280443		288800	309230	323484	338684	341268

Notes to Salaries and Wages Schedule

1. Secretary : to full-time from 2000-2001
2. Marketing : a detailed analysis of the staffing budget for the Marketing Department has not been undertaken, rather a global figure has been assumed at this stage pending the appointment of the new Marketing Manager. It should also be noted that although the Box Office salaries are included within this budget heading the staff structure diagram indicates that the Box Office will be a separate department from the Marketing Department
3. Theatre Manager/House Manager : it is proposed that the present House Manager be redesignated Theatre Manager with effect from 2001
4. Cleaner : it has been assumed an increase in hours for one of the cleaners from 2000
5. Casuals/Cellar : a modest uplift has been incorporated
6. Education Officer : see notes elsewhere in the Draft Business Plan
7. Provision for short-term redundancies : no allowance has been made for this item at present since, again, this will require detailed consideration in the light of decisions taken with regard to closure periods
8. Provision for uplifts : a modest provision has been made to allow for a review of salaries applicable from the year 2000
9. Recruitment : a modest provision has been made for any recruitment costs

11. Administration costs : RPI adjusted
12. Establishment costs : RPI adjusted for the present, though the figures will require review in the light of final decisions with regard to additional office accommodation
13. Marketing and publicity costs : a substantial uplift in the marketing budget has been proposed for the year following closure as recommended in the Marketing Strategy
14. Re-opening programme costs : an allowance for the specific costs of special programmes associated with the re-opening of the theatre
15. Other re-opening costs : an entirely notional figure at this stage for other costs (such as specific staff appointments) which may be necessary during the re-opening period
16. Education budget : this figure represents the programme budget for the new Education Officer
17. Programme development budget : this is a new budget line which seeks to respond to the need for a more pro active programming policy; it could be further enhanced as noted earlier by being added to from surpluses

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18. High Peak Borough Council : RPI adjusted plus a higher than inflation increase in the two years after re-opening
 19. Foundation for Sport and Arts : provision for a one-off grant from the FSA towards a specific aspect of programming in the opening year
 20. ACE (a) : a small figure which assumes an Arts Council contribution towards the re-opening programme costs
 21. ACE (b) : an entirely notional figure at this stage representing a contribution from the Lottery towards specific costs associated with closure
 22. ACE (c) : towards Venue Development
 23. NWAB (a) : towards education work
 24. NWAB (b) : towards touring programme
 25. Derbyshire County Council : assumes a one-off opening grant following the redevelopment
 26. Net trading position : the difference between the trading deficit and grant income
 27. Fundraising : modest targets for fundraising have been incorporated since it is assumed that the major fundraising effort will be related to the capital redevelopment
 28. Balance : see earlier comments on use of potential surpluses

11.2 Sensitivity Analysis

A number of important areas of the Budget are subject to change in the light of circumstances as they develop, and in this section these are examined in turn.

- **Box Office Income:** Budgeting for periods four or five years off - as the Budget above has sought to do - is a notoriously difficult craft. However, the Board are confident that the enhanced income indicated therein can be gained - and even exceeded, for the reasons already given: at this stage they have deliberately erred on the side of caution. The total increase anticipated through attendances is some 11%. The Board is also confident that with more comfortable and less dangerous seating it will be possible to raise the average per-seat ticket yield, whilst continuing to ensure an appropriate number of seats being available at affordable concessionary rates. If the box office did not grow at all as a result of the redevelopment or of the policies designed to build attendances, then the total anticipated income would remain at current levels - and the final year Balance (£24,000) would turn into a figure of around zero. The consultants advising the Board were confident that the present 51% of capacity being attracted to the theatre could indeed be raised - and the Board, concurring with this view, will hope to set themselves even higher targets in the years to come. Enhancing revenue from box office is a key target of the Board for the next years.
- **Bars/refreshments:** the level of increased income proposed is relatively modest, and in line with the anticipated increase in attendances. The proposed improvements to retail space in the capital programme, a commitment to increase the quality of what we sell (at an increased margin of profit) together with a review of bar and catering arrangements which we will put in place during the next year lead the Board to believe that a higher figure might ultimately be achievable. Enhancing revenue from bars is a key target for the Board for the next years.
- **Increased share margin:** although the consultants were of the view that the theatre could increase the margin in its dealing with hirers of the theatre, the Board feel that the 1% increase recommended should not be assumed within the Budget until such time as the full impact of the redevelopment, and on hirers' returns, is clearer; only a very modest level of additional income has therefore been budgeted at this stage.
- **Grant aid income:** the levels of grant aid income proposed in the Budget are difficult to summarise from a 'risk' point of view, since exposure to risk will in some cases be for one year only (e.g. from the FSA and Derbyshire C.C.) or for three years (ACE and NWAB); only the grant from the 'host council' - High Peak - shows a year on year increase, including a substantial uplift in the year of redevelopment: this should be possible since the Council's contribution to annual maintenance costs should diminish substantially after redevelopment.

11.3 Economic Impact

An estimated economic evaluation, on the re-furbished operation of the enhanced Buxton Opera House, would be undertaken as part of the next development study process in Stage Two of an Arts Council National Lottery application. This would examine refurbishment impact on-site and off-site, additionality, displacement, additional impacts and wider benefits, together with a value for money analysis. Indications of the gross employment potential and income generation attributable to the Opera House in the Buxton economy (and the wider economy of the High Peak) will be analysed. The Opera House already offers tangible benefits in terms of customer type and in terms of businesses in the immediate vicinity, such as restaurants, hotels, and property values. Incoming companies spend subsistence and accommodation allowances in the town and use of taxis and coaches by both performers and theatregoers can be estimated, together with the value of local supply contracts for premises and activities. These will be increased after refurbishment, and an annual review of our economic impact will be made thereafter, in order to provide an advocacy document for funding bodies and corporate sponsors, as a discussion document for the High Peak Borough Council, Board of Directors and for public relations purposes.