



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tyne Theatre & Opera House gains support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for plans to safeguard its Future

The Tyne Theatre & Opera House has received initial support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for Phase Two of the theatre's restoration development Master Plan, it was announced today. Made possible thanks to National Lottery players, the project aims to refurbish theatre's auditorium and stage house; and create a second community performance space in the footprint of the former Westgate Music Hall.

First phase development funding of £522,011 has been awarded by the Heritage Fund to help the Tyne Theatre & Opera House Preservation Trust, which owns and operates the venue, to progress their plans to apply for a full National Lottery grant of £5m at a later date. With match funding from the Trust of £220,380 the development stage budget will total £742,391. Subject to a successful second stage application, the overall project budget will be in the region of £7.2m - and will help to secure the long-term future of one of the UK's most significant surviving Victorian theatres for generations to come.

The investment marks a transformational moment for the Grade I listed venue, which has stood at the heart of Newcastle's cultural life since 1867. Renowned for its rare and largely intact Victorian wooden stage machinery, the theatre is recognised as a nationally significant heritage asset.

This latest award follows a sustained period of progress, with the last two to three years delivering major strides in stabilising the building and strengthening the organisation. Since the adoption of its 2022 Masterplan, approximately £1.8 million has already been invested in a range of essential refurbishment and enabling works, laying the groundwork for this major next phase of development.

Most recently, the theatre completed the refurbishment and reseating of its gallery, also made possible by a £250,000 grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, as part of a £300,000 project, with match funding provided by the Tyne Theatre & Opera House Preservation Trust. This project has improved comfort, access, and sightlines while reinstating historic decorative features and increasing capacity.

A Heritage Theatre for Everyone

At the heart of the project is a bold ambition: to transform the theatre into “a heritage theatre for everyone” - a vibrant, inclusive cultural hub open throughout the day as well as the evening.

Recent developments already demonstrate this shift. The creation of Tyne Theatre Voices, the forthcoming Tyne Theatre Show Band, the expanding youth theatre and production company, and a growing corps of volunteers across multiple disciplines reflect the Trust’s commitment to making the theatre far more than a traditional venue.

These initiatives are complemented by a rapidly expanding programme of community engagement, co-created activity, heritage interpretation, and skills development—ensuring the theatre becomes a true community performance hub in the fullest sense.

Jonathan Higgins, Chief Executive Officer, said:

“We are thrilled to have received this initial support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players we can now develop our plans to move forward with the major project to refurbish and develop the venue. This is a truly landmark moment in the history of Tyne Theatre & Opera House. Over the past few years, we have worked tirelessly to stabilise the building, strengthen our organisation, and prove what the theatre can be as a living, breathing community asset. The support of the Heritage Fund recognises that progress and gives us the platform to go much further.”

“We have already made huge strides — from major capital works to the growth of our in-house companies and community programmes. The next five years will be both exciting and challenging as we deliver a transformation that secures this extraordinary theatre for future generations and makes it accessible to all for the very first time.”

Philip Bernays OBE, Chair of the Board of Trustees, added:

“I am honoured to take on the role of Chair at such a pivotal moment. The Tyne Theatre & Opera House is a building of national importance, and this investment will ensure that it not only survives, but thrives - as a centre of creativity, heritage, and community life. The progress made in recent years has been exceptional, and this next phase will cement its place at the heart of the city’s cultural future.”

Helen Featherstone, Director, England, North, commented:

“We are delighted to support Tyne Theatre & Opera House with this initial grant to work towards transforming this much-loved Grade I listed venue. Thanks to National Lottery players, this development phase will help progress plans to safeguard the important heritage of this Newcastle icon for future generations.”

A Collective Effort

The Trust has also paid tribute to the many partners and supporters who have helped bring the project to this stage, including Newcastle City Council, the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority, The Foyle Foundation, and the wider public.

Everyday support - from attending performances and purchasing refreshments to donations and contributions via restoration levies - has played a vital role in sustaining the theatre and enabling this landmark moment.

– ENDS –

Notes to Editors

About Tyne Theatre & Opera House Preservation Trust

The Tyne Theatre & Opera House Preservation Trust became the freehold owner of the building in 2008. The first building protection group was started in the 1970's when the building closed as the Stoll Picture Theatre.

As a non-profit organisation, the trust's objectives are to secure, restore and preserve the historic Tyne Theatre and Opera House for public benefit, while promoting access to and appreciation of the arts. This includes advancing education in drama, theatre technology and the wider performing and creative arts through performances, new commissions, exhibitions, classes and demonstrations. We are also committed to conserving and interpreting historic stage machinery and technologies, ensuring their heritage and significance are accessible to present and future audiences.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Grant applications over £250,000 are assessed in two rounds. The Tyne Theatre and Opera House has initially been granted round one development funding of £522,011 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans. Detailed proposals are then considered by the Heritage Fund at second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £5m

The Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. That's why as the largest funder for the UK's heritage we are dedicated to supporting projects that connect people and communities to heritage, as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033. Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past.

By 2033 we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to make a decisive difference for people, places and communities.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

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