

Gaiety Theatre may gain an encore with three groups in talks to save

500 at meeting to debate future of historic building

MARTIN WILLIAMS

martin.williams@theherald.co.uk

HOPES that one of Scotland's oldest and most historic theatres will survive despite a council claiming it needs £4.5m in repairs rose last night after it emerged fruitful talks are being held with three groups to save it.

As 500 people attended a public meeting to register their protest, it emerged that Ian Gordon, the general manager of the Pavilion Theatre in Glasgow, had held a meeting with officers of South Ayrshire Council about taking over the

injecting an annual sum for about five years to run and pass control over to the Pavilion completely.

It is understood that the council might be willing to hand over ownership of the Gaiety for free if whoever takes it over takes responsibility for the repair bill.

Mr Gordon said that the meeting with Roddy Macdonald, the council's head of project with responsibility for Public Private Partnerships and Harry Garland, director of social work, housing and health, was "fairly positive".

He hopes that the theatre can reopen around August or September, but that is reliant on ensuring the building is safe to use.

He added: "I visited the Gaiety last week and to be honest there is a fair bit of work needed done to bring it up to a standard which would be acceptable to all parties and to this end we have asked the council to fund a restoration project ... to enable the long term future of the theatre."

"They agreed to look into this and deal with this matter fairly quickly, so I am hopeful of an early response."

Last night it was standing room only in the Holy Trinity Church in Ayr where hundreds, including veteran actor and comedian Johnny Beattie, braved freezing temperatures to grill councillors about the Gaiety's future.

However, the biggest laugh



FUTURE FEARS: Johnny Beattie and Mary Lee, wife of Jack Milroy, were among those at the meeting in Ayr's Holy Trinity Church. Picture: Martin Shields

To comment
heraldtalk
at www.theherald.co.uk

running of the 106-year-old Gaiety Theatre in Ayr.

The Gaiety, which is the former stage for comedians, singers, variety acts and icons such as Sir Harry Lauder, the jazz violinist Stephane Grappelli, Jimmy Logan and a host of other stars, is expected to close on January 31 so that the council can "examine the long-term repair and maintenance and viability of the theatre".

It has emerged that discussions between the council and Mr Gordon covered the possibility of setting up a restoration fund, which the council might help fund to

It came when Margaret Toner, deputy leader of South Ayrshire Council, who also holds an arts portfolio, admitted: "The council is just not fit for purpose."

While disbelieving laughter echoed from residents sat in pews and even the chorister's stalls she added: "... as far as the arts go."

management. "That is what is lacking at present," she added.

She was hopeful that the current negotiations would prove fruitful.

Staunch Gaiety campaigner Beattie was equally positive and got the biggest cheer of the night in facing the audience and proclaiming: "I have

"Let the clarion call be - Long Live the Gaiety!"

Beattie had earlier declared that the Gaiety was his "all-time favourite theatre in the world" and that it had an "iconic status".

Many of those who were at the meeting supported a suggestion from former Gaiety manager Bernard Cotton

