

Council sends out letter to interested groups

# LAST CHANCE TO SAVE CIVIC



THE council has sent out a consultation letter to groups asking them if it is worth £750,000 to save the Civic Theatre.

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But this week members of the amateur dramatics company claim it is a paper exercise and that the decision to keep the community theatre shut has already been made.

In their letter the council say they can restore the Craigie Road building to its former glory for £750,000 - but groups who use the theatre could be charged THREE times as much for putting on shows.

In a letter sent out to amateur dramatics groups, opera companies and music clubs, entitled 'Civic Theatre User Group Consultation', the council ask for the views of local people on the possible investment.

Ayr Fort Players, one of the groups who received the letter, have been forced to flit between a number of halls across South Ayrshire for rehearsals over the past two years, all of which are deemed inadequate due to a lack of consistency and certainty as to their long-term home.

And one member told the Advertiser Series the new consultation was a scam:

He hit out: "The letter consists of 'yes' and 'no' answers, and to be perfectly frank, I get the impression that South Ayrshire Council aren't bothering their shirt with how we feel about the future of the Civic. They won't listen."

"The form is absolutely terrible. It is supposed to be something of a consultation document, but nowhere do we have the opportunity to present any kind of meaningful feedback or dialogue."

He added: "There are three parts of the Civic Theatre that the council say are riddled with asbestos, but the fact is, two of them are not used by members of the theatre - one is a storeroom!"

"I have spoken to a friend of mine who is a joiner and he said he would be able to carry out the repair work for a third of the price and walk away loaded! I don't understand where this figure of

by MARTYN  
McLAUGHLIN

£750,000 has come from, and there has been no information on the scale of charges - I'd be interested in seeing some detailed costing."

The ongoing saga of the future of the Civic has caused controversy in the town over recent years. The theatre has suffered a gradual decline over the years and was closed nearly in August 2002 following the discovery of asbestos.

But in this latest move, Derek Cunningham, Head of Enterprise, Tourism and Leisure at South Ayrshire Council, explained the future of the theatre was still unclear, and stressed that were it to re-open, it could hit the pockets of local community organisations hard.

His letter states: "At present no decision has been taken on the future of the Civic Theatre. Councillors wish to find out what former user groups think about this matter before any decision is taken. Your group's response will play an important part in any future decision making process."

"If the theatre is reopened as a community facility, it will have to be managed in a different way from before to comply with the new, stricter regulations. This would mean higher operating costs."

### Impact

It continues: "These would have to be either funded by the council or met from higher charges to people who use the theatre. An initial assessment by the council of the impact on user charges is that they will be between two to three times higher than was the case immediately before the theatre was closed."

Groups have until Monday to return their consultation to the council.

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