



7

**THE BRUNTON THEATRE TRUST REPORT**  
**For Audit and Governance Committee For the year ended 31 March 2024**

**Charity No SC022422**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 From April 2022, The Brunton was in a recovery period post Covid. Audiences were slowly beginning to return to the Brunton. Touring companies and promoters were beginning to offer artistic product again and the programme at The Brunton was able to be re-established.

1.2 As the year progressed, audience attendance at events grew until from autumn 2022 onwards they were back at pre-Covid levels, and the programme was being well received by audiences.

1.3 The Aims of BTT are set out in the Declaration of Trust as follows:

*“for the advancement of education in the fields of the performing arts and related cultural activities and for the promotion of social welfare of the public at large and in particular of the inhabitants of Musselburgh and of visitors thereto by the promotion of performances and displays of drama, music and similar arts suitable for presentation to the general public in appropriate halls, theatres and other premises in the UK and in particular in the Brunton Theatre, Musselburgh”.*

1.4 The aim of the programme is to provide the highest quality drama, dance, music, theatre for children and young people, film and comedy nights for the enjoyment and enrichment of the communities that the theatre serves.

1.5 In addition to offering a high-quality programme of arts events for audiences to attend at the Theatre, BTT aim to provide opportunities for involvement and participation in the arts through education and outreach activities for all sections of the community including harder to reach groups.

1.6 Through the provision of a high-quality accessible programme of performances and participatory activities, BTT seeks to achieve the Aims as set out in the Trust Deed.

1.7 In March 2023, during regular maintenance checks on the building by the Council, structural issues were discovered in the roof of the Brunton due to RAAC. This resulted in the Council taking the decision to close the performance spaces to enable further surveys to take place.

1.8 This meant that the programme at The Brunton was suspended, and the team started to move all of the programme to alternative venues in Musselburgh and beyond to enable the programme to continue. This action received huge support from audiences.

1.9 In September 2023, The Trust took over the lease of Haddington Corn Exchange to present its re-located programme along with renting Loretto School Theatre and Northesk Church in Musselburgh as and when required. The Brunton team launched a programme at all three venues during 2023-24.

1.10 The cost leasing Haddington Corn Exchange, the equipment required to support the performance programme and renting the other 2 venues was an unexpected cost to the Trust.

1.11 In addition there was a loss of some of the programming and audiences due to the change in the venues.

1.12 This unplanned situation impacted on the Trust's finances resulting in the Trust using reserves to enable their programme to continue.

1.13 Financial support from Creative Scotland during this period helped to support the performance programme and some of the infrastructure costs.

## **2. PROGRAMME OUTCOMES 2023/24**

In 2023/24, the programme was transferred to alternative venues due to RAAC in the roof of The Brunton. This impacted on the programme and resulted in a reduction in the number of performances and screenings. Despite this situation the programme still delivered the following outcomes.

### **Live Performances and Film Screenings**

There were 33 film screenings with a total attendance of 1957.

There were 36 Panto performances including performances in schools and in Loretto Theatre with a total attendance of 6,875.

There were 10 drama performances with a total attendance of 536.

There were 44 music performances with a total attendance of 8,719.

There were 8 children's theatre performances with a total attendance of 474.

There were 3 comedy performances with a total attendance of 391.

There was 1 event with a total attendance of 352.

There were 4 performances from commercial hires with a total attendance of 613.

There were 52 performances or events from voluntary and nonvoluntary groups with a total attendance of 11,188.

In addition, there were 12 performances from the Brunton's community performing arts network activities with a total attendance of 1,507.

### **Participatory Arts**

Supporting a Participatory Arts network is part of the successful development of a coherent and relevant programme of activities for adults, children and young people. The existence of such a network actively supports the Trust and East Lothian Council's policies on expressive arts, health and well-being and social inclusion.

In 2023-24 BPAN, the Performing Arts network of youth theatre, dance and musical theatre, classes enabled 305 people to attend on a weekly basis to learn new skills and have fun within a creative environment. Funding from Creative Scotland enabled targeted work to be undertaken with Council services for key groups including the provision of supported places which widened access to the programme.

The 2023/24 the community arts programme presented a successful re-staging of The Steamie at Loretto Theatre with community participants. The Musical Theatre Summer School was also presented in Loretto Theatre with 50 participants presenting Bugsy in August and this was followed by 13 The Musical in February with 25 young people.

These productions enabled local performers to be supported by the Brunton's team of creative staff to present high quality work for an audience of 1507.

### **3. IMPACT OF RAAC ON BTT'S BUSINESS MODEL**

3.1 During 2023/24 the Brunton team sourced alternative venues, moved performances to these venues and postponed or cancelled performances that were unable to be moved. The work involved to do this was complex as it included keeping customers and promoters up to date with changes, viewing potential venues, booking venues, arranging licences, risk assessments, fire evacuation procedures, marketing materials, installing technical equipment, setting up bars and refreshments and undertaking staff briefings.

3.2 In September 2023, the Trust leased Haddington Corn Exchange as an alternative venue which also provided the opportunity to develop new audiences for the programme from the East of the county. Feedback from the programme that was presented in the alternative venues was gathered and was very encouraging.

3.3 However the restrictions in technical facilities at the alternative venues and with some audiences not keen to go to the alternative venues due to location, there was an overall reduction over the year in programming and audiences.

3.4 During 2023/24 when the performance spaces had to close, the impact on the Brunton Bistro's business was considerable. The Brunton team continued to work with the Bistro where possible to offer its catering for classical lunchtime concerts and pre-show suppers if shows were presented in a local venue.

3.5 However there was a reduction in the number of opportunities for these linked meals and with a general downturn in business due to the partial closure of the Brunton building, the Bistro managers took the decision to close.

3.6 In 2023/24 as the Trust navigated its way through a challenging period following the discovery of RAAC in the building the Trust secured financial support from Creative Scotland to support key projects and infrastructure costs during this crisis.

3.7 The main source of public funding was the annual contract payment from East Lothian Council which was maintained at the same level in 2023/24.

3.6 However despite best efforts, operating costs increased due to the need to hire alternative venues, and this coupled with the additional unplanned costs and a reduction in earned income through box office due to the changes that had to be made to the programme, resulted in the Trust using a large portion of its reserves to maintain the programme.

### **4. THE FUTURE**

4.1 In January 2024, East Lothian Council made the decision that due to budget pressures it would reduce the annual payment to BTT by £200,000 from 2024/25 onwards.

4.2 The Trust will therefore require to use further reserves to maintain its programme during 2024/25.

4.3 The Trust's current reserves policy is that the unrestricted funds not committed or invested in tangible fixed assets ('the free reserves') held by the charity should be equivalent to three months of the resources expended.

4.4 The Trust has identified 4 key risk areas going forward:

- **Reduction in Earned Income**

Income generation is a principal risk factor for the Trust and risks associated with raising sufficient income to deliver the aims of the Trust has been considered.

- **Reduction in annual payment from East Lothian Council.**

This annual payment is crucial to the effective delivery of the Service Level Agreement on behalf of the Council for the residents of East Lothian and the reduction of £200,000 from 2024/25 onwards will have an impact on the delivery of the services provided.

- **Reduction in Programme**

The reduction in the programme will impact on earned income levels and a corresponding saving on expenditure is required to be made. The reduction in the programme would impact on the breadth of programme presented and the Brunton's role as a key receiving house in the Scottish cultural landscape.

- **Reduction in earned income from ticket sales and bars.**

Earned income is the largest percentage of the Trust's income and a reduction in the ability to generate sufficient funds from ticket sales and bars would prove detrimental to the cultural aims of the organisation.

4.5 The Trust is working with the Brunton Team and Council Officials to mitigate against the risks which will impact the Trust over the next 4 years.

4.6 From 2024/25 onwards the Trust has created plans to increase its income and raise additional funding to enable the Charity to continue as a going concern.

4.7 A funding application has been submitted to Creative Scotland for 2025/26.

4.8 The Trust has also prepared a fairly ambitious Income Generation and Diversification Action Plan to increase its income from other sources.

4.9 The Trust has prepared its future budget on the basis of presenting its programme in the alternative venues including Haddington Corn Exchange.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

5.1 The aim of the work presented by the BTT is to provide a widely accessible programme for the enrichment and enjoyment of audiences and participants.

5.2 2023/24 was a particularly challenging year for the Trust and the Brunton team with the sudden loss of its performance spaces and the need to transfer the whole programme into alternative venues.

5.3 This has impacted hugely on the Trust's financial position through the resulting increased costs that the Trust has had to bear and the Trust's ability to raise income from a reduced programme of activities.

5.4 However during this time the Brunton team demonstrated its resilience and flexibility in the face of adversity, ensuring that the programme continued to be presented to a high standard in alternative spaces for the benefit and enjoyment of East Lothian residents.

5.5 It is crucial to the Trust that it continues to work in partnership with East Lothian Council and receives support to deliver arts services on behalf of the Council for East Lothian residents.